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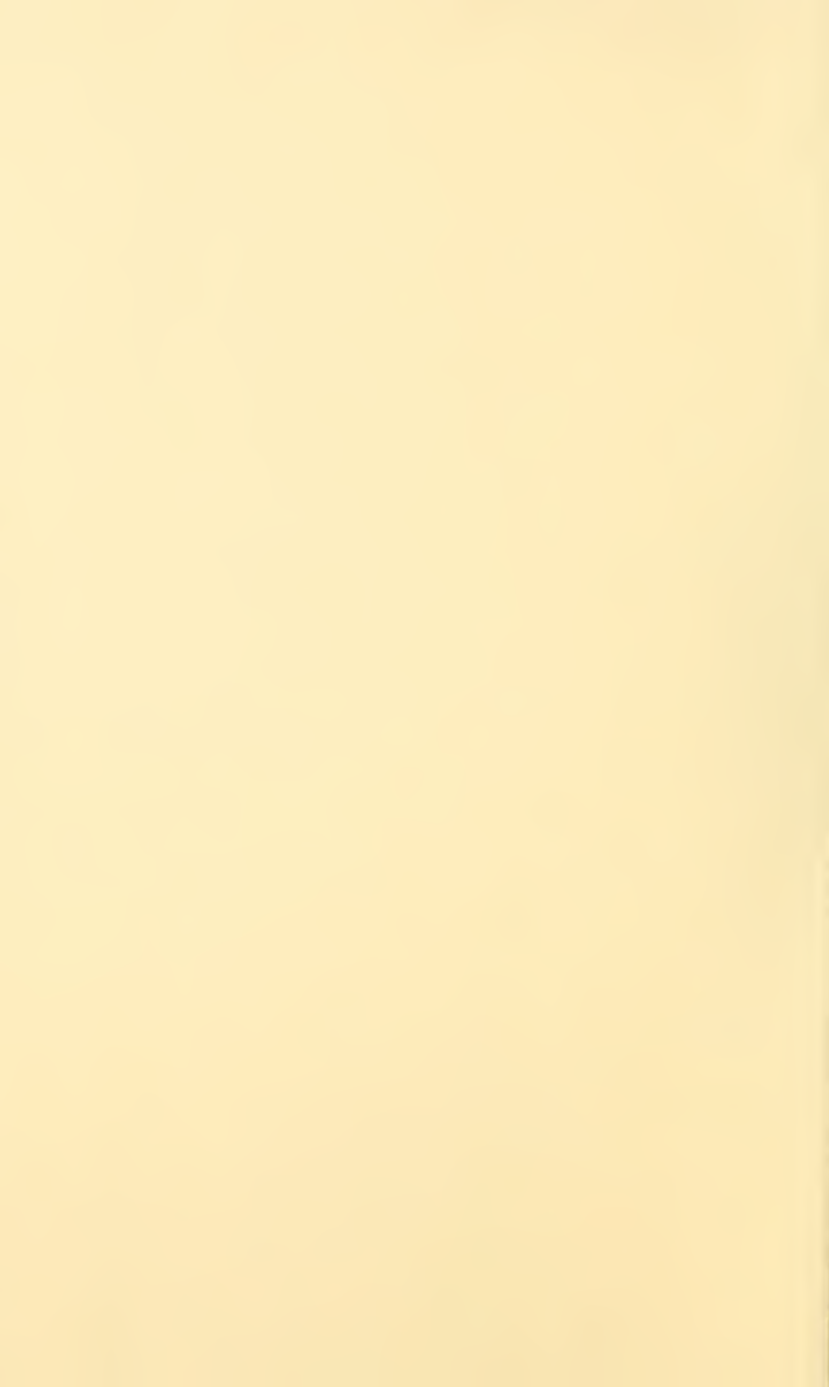
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## HER BROTHER'S CODE



# HER BROTHER'S CODE

*A Drama of Life*

IN

FOUR ACTS

BY

DANIEL BROR SORLIN

*Author of "Friend Karl," "The Norseman," etc.*



THE CORNHILL COMPANY

BOSTON

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no. 1.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

ESTELLE BERKLEY, a resolute young woman

GORDON BERKLEY, her recreant brother

PAUL KIRKE, a young civil engineer

MYRA KIRKE, his erring sister

ABNER KIRKE, an old Adirondack guide

MARTHA, his wife

CALVIN BERKLEY, a wealthy New York contractor

ANTONIA BERKLEY-WELLS, his widowed sister

REISENSTEIN, proprietor of a Road House

*Maid, Valet, Waiter, Stenographer, etc.*

## SYNOPSIS OF SCENERY

### ACT I.

Summer Camp in the Adirondacks at Kirke's Cove

### ACT II.

*(Three months later)*

Drawing Room of the Berkleys' New York Home

### ACT III.

*(The next evening)*

Private Dining Room of Road House in the Bronx

### ACT IV.

*(The following morning)*

Office of the Berkley Construction Co. in Lower Broadway

*Time—The Present*



ACT I



# HER BROTHER'S CODE

## ACT I

Scene—SUMMER CAMP IN THE ADIRONDACKS

Setting represents a "clearing" in mountainous region, with (back drop) perspective view of mountains in background and part of lake showing at Left. At Right of stage façade of a pretentious summer camp house with veranda and stairs: at Left down stage vine-covered arbor of rustic design, projecting off stage, entrance of arbor facing house; rustic settee down stage. Exit at Right above house; opening at Left beyond arbor to supposed pathway to lake.

CURTAIN RISES on darkness; LIGHT gradually discloses: dim view of sky-line with tops of mountains; as light increases lake is seen; then stage proper is revealed, and as "action" begins on stage light increases to full dawn.

Enter MARTHA and ABNER at Left, the latter in "rough and ready" backwoods' costume; MARTHA in homespun but neat, half-modern, half-old-style costume.

ABNER (*as they enter, with broad, "up-state" dialect, after a look toward house*): Not a soul of 'em stirrin' yet, an' I told 'em last night to be all ready by daylight for the row across the lake to catch the down stage at the Cove. They'll never reach Noo York today if they don't get an everlastin' hustle on themselves, I'll be a-tellin' 'em.

(*Makes move to rouse out inmates of house.*)

MARTHA (*checking him, drawing him to settee*): Don't, Ab. You sent word to the driver of the stage to wait at the Cove, and that he'd be well paid in case of delay, didn't you?

ABNER (*sitting down with her on settee*): Ye-es; but Hank don't cotton to rich folks a mite, an' it'd be jess like him to drive off lickity-split if they ain't at the landin' when he gets there.

MARTHA: Well, that wouldn't be *your* fault.

ABNER (*dryly*): No-o; but I'd get the blame, jess the same.

When rich folks slam out orders an' foot the bills, they expect *reesults* — not excuses.

MARTHA: But the Berkleys are different from some of the other campers we've had here. They're not a bit stuck-up — have treated us more like equals — and I'm sorry their vacation is over.

(*Sighs.*)

ABNER: So'm I. I like 'em all — but the son; I can't go him much—

MARTHA: Oh, he's nothing but a foolish boy.

ABNER: Not foolish — jess lazy. If takin' your breath didn't come sort o' natur'l, he'd choke to death for want of air.

MARTHA (*smiling*): But the daughter makes up for —

ABNER (*interrupting enthusiastically*): Now you're shoutin'! She's the finest bit of city-bred girl-flesh that ever landed in these diggin's,— an' by the Great Horned Toad! I'd like to kidnap her an' keep her here forever.

MARTHA (*amused*): If you weren't so old and sensible, Ab, you might make me jealous of her.—

ABNER: Oh, shucks, Martha! I could be her father twice over; but I b'lieve I love her jess as much as our daughter Myra — an' that's sayin' a lot, for Myra's always been my weak point, an' you know it.

MARTHA: I ought to — considering the many times you've stopped me from correcting her, even when you knew she needed it.

ABNER: I can't help doin' that. Little Myra's wound 'round my heart-strings kind o' tightlike, an' I can't bear to hear you scoldin' her; (*thoughtfully*) an' if anythin' happened to Myra — well, I reckon I'd break out somethin' unusual.

MARTHA: But don't you love our son Paul as well as Myra?

ABNER: O' course; but he's a man — a real man — for all

his college education, an' he don't need to be coddled like Myra — an' you.

*(Gives her an affectionate caress.)*

MARTHA: Isn't it too bad Paul didn't get back from the West in time to meet the Berkleys?

ABNER: Yes; I kinder hoped he'd finish that civil-engineering job an' get home afore they left. It might 'a' changed his idees o' city folks. He never had much use for 'em — for all his bein' to college; *(reflectively)* but p'raps it's jess as well he didn't get here.

MARTHA: Why?

ABNER: 'Cause he might 'a' tumbled in love with Estelle, an' that would 'a' been hell — for him. She's too rich a plum for a poor man's son to pick.

MARTHA: We're not poor, Ab. Don't we own this camp, and isn't it bringing us a good rental every year? And haven't we our own little home down by the lake? And doesn't Paul earn a good salary as civil engineer?

ABNER *(smiling benignly)*: We're as rich as any of the old settlers in these parts, Martha; but when it comes to countin' wealth in millions as Berkley does — well, we're mighty small potatoes in the world-patch.

MARTHA: Then I prefer to be a small potato. Making millions almost brought Mr. Berkley to death's door, and he had to take his doctor's advice and come here to regain his health.

ABNER: An' I'd like to shake that doctor's hand, for it made me 'quainted with a thoroughbred — a man who went after his health like he's been after the dollars, an' never put on any high an' mighty airs while doin' it, as some o' the other campers used to do.

MARTHA *(mischievously)*: And he also brought a daughter for you to fall in love with —

ABNER: Sure; an' she's another thoroughbred. In spite of her father's millions, she's treated our daughter like a sister; an' she always rings true — like pure gold. I wish I could say the same for the son, but I can't; an' I sha'n't be sorry to see the last o' *him*.

MARTHA: Why?

ABNER: Well, I've seen him talkin' to Myra a few times, an' I don't b'lieve anythin' he has to say is worth list'nin' to; but I notices she did, jess the same.

MARTHA (*smiling*): Are you afraid they've fallen in love with each other?

ABNER: No; he's too lazy to fall in love with anythin' but an easy chair. (*Thoughtfully*) But fool notions *might* come into Myra's head — if he stayed here long 'nuff.

MARTHA: Oh, nonsense, Abner. Why, I've never seen the least thing out of the way between them.

ABNER: Mothers 're nearly always blind — until the eye-opener comes; an' then it's gen'ra'ly too late to do their eyesight any good — the same as when I sneaked you over to the parson an' had the knot tied afore your mother ever dreamed o' me as a son-in-law.

MARTHA: But Myra's too sensible a girl for any foolish love affair.

ABNER: I'm hopin' so; but love an' sense never was known to follow the same trail — or you'd 'a' married that college professor 'stead o' takin' a poor mountain guide like me.

MARTHA: Well, I've never regretted my choice of mate.

ABNER: But your mother did — to her dyin' day.

(*Noise heard in house; both look toward house.*)

(*Enter Berkley from house in travelling costume.*)

BERKLEY (*genially*): Hello! — already here! — and I thought I'd surprise you by being out before you arrived. But I guess it's pretty hard to catch an old warhorse like you

asleep at the switch — eh, Kirke? Did he keep you up all night, Mrs. Kirke, to be sure he'd be here on time?

MARTHA: No; he's the finest alarm clock in the world when it comes to early rising, Mr. Berkley.

ABNER: I can't seem to lose the habit I got in my younger days o' bein' up with the sun, but now I often wish he wouldn't be in such a hurry to rout me out o' bed. (*The Others smile.*) Rest o' the folks all ready?

BERKLEY: All but Gordon, I believe, but I heard my sister berating him as I came out —

(*Enter Antonia, in travelling costume, from house, showing disgust, but greets Martha and Abner genially with ad lib. words, then turns to Berkley with a frown.*)

ANTONIA: Calvin, when we get back to New York I want you to hunt up a good specialist for Gordon. His laziness has become a chronic disease, and there must be a cure for it.

(*Martha and Abner exchange amused looks.*)

BERKLEY: The only cure he needs is an application of birch switches, and if he were a little younger I'd administer the dose myself — as I should have done years ago. Where's Estelle?

ANTONIA: I'm not supposed to tell you, but yesterday Estelle and Myra planned to climb Bald Cliff before daylight this morning for a last look at the rising sun, as a sort of farewell at the end of our vacation.

MARTHA: I also knew of this plan, but Myra begged me not to tell you, Abner.

ABNER: Good thing you didn't, or I'd 'a' stopped 'em. Talk about your boys — why, those two girls 've got any of 'em lashed to a tree. Climbin' Bald Cliff is hard 'nuff in daylight — let alone doin' it afore dawn jess to see the sun come up. I'll agree it's one o' the finest sights in the

state, but it's more'n I'd want to tackle now, in the dark, with all my experience on mountain paths.

*(Antonia and Berkley show uneasiness.)*

BERKLEY: Do you — think — there's any danger?

ABNER: Not a great deal — if your daughter sticks to Myra.

She can see in the dark like a lynx, an' knows all the trails 'round here like a fox, so don't go to worryin'. I've trained Myra since she was a baby, an' there ain't much about woodcraft she doesn't know. The only thing botherin' me is whether they'll get back in time for you folks to catch the stage.

BERKLEY: I hope they do, for I've simply got to be in my New York office tomorrow morning — *(looking around regretfully)* — much as I hate to leave this section — now.

ANTONIA: But remember how badly you hated to take the doctor's advice and come here in the first place.

BERKLEY: I admit it. I didn't see how I could leave my business —

ANTONIA: You business men never do until it's too late, as a rule. You would have been dead by this time if you *hadn't* left New York, and then what good would your business have done you?

ABNER *(chuckingly)*: I reckon it's kinder hard to do business after you're dead, but I guess you're in trim to go chasin' the dollars better'n ever now. You outrowed me on the lake yesterday, an' when you first came here I didn't think you could lift a toothpick.

BERKLEY *(slapping Abner's shoulder heartily)*: I've got you to thank for my returned health, Kirke.

ABNER: Nothin' o' the kind. If you want to do any thankin', get down on your knees to good old Mother Nature; for if you give her half a show she'll pull you through — even if you've got a foot an' three-quarters in the grave.

BERKLEY: Guess you're right, and I'll give her another whack at me next year; and say, you'll either have to sell this place to me, or give me a long-term lease — (*smilingly*) — or I'll buy up all the land around here and crowd you out.

ABNER (*amused*): You'd find me pretty tough "crowdin'." (*Pointing off L.*) You see that old oak over yonder? Well, that's been there more'n a hundred years, an' I'd like to see anythin' short of an earthquake pull it out by the roots; an' I'm like a twin brother to that oak — when it comes to stickin' to my belongin's — though I ain't quite as old.

BERKLEY: But why in thunder won't you sell the place to me — at your own price?

ABNER: 'Cause I don't care 'nuff for money, I guess; an' I've always planned to give the camp to the first one o' my children that got married; but that's a long time off, I'm figgerin'; so you're welcome to rent it till then.

BERKLEY: Thanks, Kirke. I won't press the matter of sale — if that's the way you feel about it. (*To Antonia*) Please go in and see if Gordon is up yet. I'd do it myself, but I'm afraid I'd break loose if I found him still in bed.

ANTONIA: You leave him to me. He'll receive a shower-bath of ice-cold spring water if he isn't up now. Come in, Mrs. Kirke, and have a cup of warm coffee.

MARTHA: Thank you; I'll certainly appreciate it, for my husband hurried me so this morning that I didn't have time to finish mine at the cabin.

ABNER (*as they go to house*): Don't give her more'n one cup, Mrs. Wells, as it's bad for her nerves. I've been preachin' the water-cure to her for thirty years, but she still likes to hug the coffee-pot.

MARTHA: Oh, bother with your preaching about water! You can drink the lake dry if you want to, but I'll stick to my coffee and tea — and what are you going to do about it, Mister Kirke?

ABNER: Nothin', — but keep on preachin' an' hopin' for the best, — though I reckon you're a hopeless case, Mrs. Kirke.

*(Exit Women into house, laughing; Men exchange amused looks.)*

BERKLEY: Do you often clash on the coffee question, Kirke?

ABNER *(producing pipe from pocket)*: Ev'ry day — reg'lar as the clock — for I'm death on coffee. *(Lights pipe.)*

BERKLEY *(watching him with a mischievous smile)*: Does she ever object to your smoking?

ABNER *(puffing)*: Never; — an' it wouldn't do her a mite o' good if she did.

BERKLEY: But according to medical authority, neither coffee nor tobacco is beneficial to us — in fact, both are more or less harmful, we're told; and she might get back at you if she wanted to.

ABNER *(abruptly, with a look toward house)*: Say, don't put her wise to that — or I'll never be able to open my head about coffee.

BERKLEY *(laughing)*: There you are. We all have our pet little "vices," but always decry those we see in others — if they don't happen to be like our own. Now, I have mine. I like champagne — not too much of it — just enough to make the blood tingle a bit; and my sister is dead against it, but likes her coffee and tea. Have I the right to oppose her habit without dropping mine?

ABNER *(thoughtfully)*: That's a clincher of an argiment. Reckon I'll have to ease up on the coffee question, for I

could never give up my pipe. Gee, we're never too old to learn, are we?

BERKLEY: Hardly — unless we're hide-bound by prejudice. (*With sudden sober mood*) Say, Kirke, I've been thinking of asking you to do me a favor. —

ABNER: That'd be a great pleasure, Mr. Berkley. Jess tell me what it is.

BERKLEY: I need Estelle in New York, as she knows a great deal about my business, and is of considerable assistance to me at times, but Gordon is absolutely of no use to me. I'm ashamed to have to say this about my own son, but it is the truth, and I know you'll treat the matter confidentially.

ABNER: I sure will.

BERKLEY: Thank you. I took Gordon up here with us rather against his will, but I did it to break him away from his loose club life and looser associates. If I find him drifting back into his former mode of living when we return to New York, I want to send him up here again under your care for a few additional months — (*as Abner is about to offer an objection*)—Oh, he'd have to do it, or I'd cut off his allowance entirely. The question is: would you be willing to take charge of him?

ABNER (*soberly*): I'm sorry you asked me that, Mr. Berkley.

BERKLEY (*surprised*): Why?

ABNER: 'Cause I'd do mos' anythin' for you — but not that — not if you offered me a gold mine for it. I have a young daughter's repitation to think of, an' evil tongues would be sure to wag whether there was cause for it 'r not — you can see that, can't you?

BERKLEY: Of course, — though I didn't think of it when planning Gordon's future. I realize how impossible the

situation would be for you, so let's drop the subject. I'll see what I can do to straighten him out in New York.

ABNER: I'm awful' sorry I couldn't do this for you, Mr. Berkley —

BERKLEY (*grasping Other's hand warmly*): I appreciate your feelings thoroughly. I have a daughter of my own, and it was thoughtless of me to make the suggestion I did. Let us forget it. I want to take another look around the place before we leave. Will you come along?

(*Abner nods assent and both exit above house.*)

(*Estelle sticks head out through arbor opening; looks around; enters. Is dressed in corduroy outing costume, the skirt of which has a rip at side and gives other evidence of recent mountain climbing.*)

ESTELLE (*as she enters*): Come on, Myra. Not a soul in sight. Guess we've stole a march on all of them, and if aunty hasn't given us away I think we'll escape a scolding.

(*Enter Myra from arbor in light-weight, gray buckskin costume which also shows effect of the morning's climb.*)

MYRA (*indicating rip in Estelle's skirt*): If you can slip into the house and change your skirt they'll never know what happened to you. . . And really, Estelle, I feel guilty. I never was so frightened in my life as when you lost your footing —

ESTELLE: You didn't *show* any fright, but if it hadn't been for you — well, I guess I'd be with the angels by this time — and that's no joking matter. You're a wonder, Myra, and that I owe my life to you is something I shall never forget.

MYRA: Oh, pshaw! I only reached down and helped to pull you up.

ESTELLE: Only! Why, in helping me you came so near going over head first yourself that I nearly fainted with terror; and the suspense seemed an eternity until you managed to get a secure foothold —

MYRA: Don't let us talk about it. To me it is horrible, for if anything serious had happened to you I'd never been able to forgive myself for allowing you to coax me into taking you up Bald Cliff before daylight — and I'll never do it again.

ESTELLE: Yes, you will. When we come here next year we'll do it all over again — that is, all except my fall. I'll be more careful then, I promise you. Why, I wouldn't have missed it for all the money in the world, and the danger only added spice to it. This morning's vision will remain with me as long as I live. (*Descriptively*) I can see it now: Pitch darkness all around us — gradually changing to the first glimmer of dawn — you and I seated on the edge of Bald Cliff, with a sheer drop of a hundred and fifty feet to the lake beneath us, waiting for glorious Dame Nature to paint a picture that no artist could ever portray on canvass — with the first rays of light striking the mountain tops like a halo; then revealing the solitary peaks in their stately grandeur; next, the wooded slopes coming into view with their abundant verdure; and then the light creeping down to the lake and flooding it with a silvery shimmer — until the majestic sun arose and threw a golden shower of scintillating rays over it all, crowning the picture with a diadem of jeweled colors that seemed to draw my very soul from my body and launch it into infinite space! (*Stands looking off as if enthralled by her vision, Myra staring at her in amazement.*)

MYRA: Gracious, Estelle! you've taken my breath away with that description. How could you ever find the words?

ESTELLE (*recovering and throwing arms around her affectionately*): My vocabulary is too limited to properly describe this morning's wonderful sight; and I envy you, Myra, who can remain here and enjoy Nature's free wilds, while I must go back to humdrum city life, with all its false ostentation and selfish greed for money-making. If father didn't need me in New York, I'd be willing to stay here the year round.

MYRA: But I thought New York was just grand when my brother took me down there last year — though I was afraid the tall buildings would topple over and crush the life out of me.

ESTELLE (*smiling at her naive manner*): Too bad you haven't a picture of your brother — so I could see if he resembles you.

MYRA: Brother would never have one taken. He's like father, who once said he'd break the camera if he ever caught anyone snapping him.

ESTELLE: I wonder what he'd say if he knew I snapped him unawares the other day, — but you mustn't tell him until after we're gone. (*Bus of amusement between them as noise is heard in house.*) Now someone is coming out — and they'll see this rip in my skirt. I wish I had a pin; that's an article a woman should never be without. (*Enter Gordon from house, yawning, followed by Antonia, scolding; Gordon in tweed outing suit.*)

GORDON (*testily, as they enter*): Oh, let me alone, aunty, now that I'm up. (*Seeing Others*) Hello! Here are the mountain climbers. You two must be crazy to do a thing like that before daylight.

ESTELLE (*sarcastically, trying to conceal rip*): I suppose it's more sane to stay in bed all morning as you generally do.

You find the bedclothes the best scenery in the world, don't you?

GORDON (*noticing rip*): Well, they don't tear my wearing apparel — as *your* scenery-viewing seems to have done. What part of Bald Cliff did you collide with to get that rip, sis?

ESTELLE: If I told you it wouldn't enlighten your marvelous intelligence a particle. You've never been near Bald Cliff; in fact, you've never been a hundred yards from a rocking-chair since we came here. (*Reproachfully to Antonia, as Gordon makes an impatient gesture*) I thought you weren't going to tell where we went, aunty.

ANTONIA: I couldn't help it when your father asked for you, and as long as you returned safely no harm is done. But now you'll have to hurry and change your skirt. We're all ready for the trip back to New York—the only city in the whole country to me.

GORDON: Now you're talking sense for once, aunty. I'm just aching to get back there — after living all these months in this God-forsaken wilderness.

ESTELLE: A few months more of this "wilderness" might do you a world of good. Father told me last night he was tempted to leave you behind as a cure for your laziness.

(*Myra, who has bent head in reserve upon Gordon's entrance, now looks up with an interested expression.*)

GORDON (*alarmed*): Leave me behind! Good heavens! I'd rather be sent to jail!

(*Myra, unnoticed by Others, gives Gordon a glance of reproach, then looks away.*)

ESTELLE: That's probably where you'll land some day — if you don't mend your ways.

ANTONIA: Here! Stop this! You come right in the house and change your skirt, Estelle.

ESTELLE: All right, aunty. You'd better come with me, Myra, for Gordon is the poorest company in the world — unless you can talk horse-racing or gambling, and neither of these accomplishments is in your line.

*(Gordon shows impatience.)*

MYRA *(quietly, not wishing to show she desires an interview with Gordon)*: No; I'll wait here until you're ready to go to the boats. Being out-of-doors always suits me the best.

ESTELLE: I know it, you child of nature; but don't let my brother bore you to death. *(Going to house with Antonia)* Gordon, try and make yourself agreeable to Myra while I'm gone — however distasteful it must be for you to act the part of a gentleman.

GORDON *(snappishly)*: Your heavy sarcasm goes in one ear and out the other.

ESTELLE: Because there's nothing inside your head to stop it, of course.

ANTONIA: I've got to separate you two or there'll be no end to this everlasting bickering.

*(Grasps Estelle's arm to draw her to door.)*

ESTELLE *(laughingly releasing herself)*: I'll come peaceably, aunty; so reserve your armstrong methods for Gordon's benefit. He needs them, but I don't. Myra, please pardon me for leaving you at the mercy of my uninteresting brother. I'll return as quickly as possible and save you from dying of innocuous desuetude.

*(Exits with Antonia in house.)*

*(Constrained pause between Gordon and Myra.)*

MYRA *(slowly)*: So you'd rather go to jail, Gordon, than remain here — in the "wilderness" — with me?

GORDON *(nervously)*: I didn't say that. I was referring to the camp — not you.

MYRA: Don't try to blind me, Gordon. Two months ago — when you found your way to my heart — I was an inexperienced child, and I made the fearful mistake of trusting you and believing in your promises; but since then my eyes have opened to a full realization of what you are, and I know that you're going away from here with the intention of forgetting me entirely.

GORDON: You're wrong there, Myra. —

MYRA: No; I'm not wrong. I'd like to believe that you meant all that you said to me, — but I can't — now.

GORDON: But I've explained to you that if I told father without any warning, he'd probably disinherit me, and then I'd be in a fine fix. I don't stand very well with him as it is, but I think I can gradually broach the subject in New York and get his consent to my marrying you as I agreed — if you'll have patience and wait and keep the matter secret for the present.

*(Glances toward house apprehensively.)*

MYRA: You needn't be alarmed that I shall say a word to your people. *(He shows relief.)* I couldn't bear to see your sister turn from me with a shudder. *(Bitterly)* And that's what hurts me the most — that I've had to deceive *her* — when I know she has faith in me — that she believes I am the same today as I was when she first met me — *(with sudden vehemence)* — and which I would be — if you hadn't come into my life! —

GORDON *(glancing anxiously toward house)*: Hush! Not so loud. They might hear you.

MYRA *(repressing emotion)*: Oh, I'll keep control over myself until you're safely away from here — and even then I'll have to be careful; for if my father ever suspected the truth he'd never rest until he'd taken your life — and I don't want your blood upon his hands. —

GORDON (*gaspingly*): Good Lord! Is he that kind of a fool?

MYRA (*sharply*): Don't you call my father a fool. He's one of the squarest men that ever lived, but he believes in the ancient law of the wilds that dishonor must be wiped out with death. I'm not telling you this to frighten you into keeping your promise, — for I don't know as I'd want to marry you now — unless — unless it became — necessary.

(*Turns away with bowed head.*)

(*Berkley and Abner heard talking ad lib. beyond house.*)

GORDON (*apprehensively*): I hear your father's voice. If he sees us together he might grow suspicious — and — take a shot at me.—

(*Hurries out through arbor.*)

(*Myra looks after him disdainfully for an instant at his show of cowardice, but decides to follow him, going out through arbor.*)

(*Enter Berkley and Abner at U. E. R.*)

BERKLEY: I tell you, Kirke, if you'll only come to New York I'll give you the time of your life.

ABNER: I ain't been to Noo York for twenty years, but you kinder tempt me to take another crack at the town, tho' I mos' choked to death the last time I went there. The air you get into your lungs should be parboiled afore they allow you to swallow it — an' say, ev'ry time I tried to cross a street I thought my last moment 'd come, with the dodgin', fillin' an' backin' to escape bein' run over. Mount'in' climbin' is easy 'side o' tryin' to navigate the streets o' Noo York.

BERKLEY (*amused*): You're a great character, Kirke. Nothing would please me better than to introduce you to my club friends. You'd make them all sit up and take notice. At your age you're as spry and strong as a young man of

twenty-five, and I don't think there's a better rifle or pistol shot in the country than you are today.

ABNER: Shucks, that's nothin' to brag 'bout — when a man was born with a gun in his fist.

BERKLEY: Say, if I can get away from business this fall I'm going to take a few friends up here for a week or two of deer-hunting — if you'll agree to show us where to find them without too much tramping around.

ABNER: But that's the best an' healthiest part o' the sport. You might as well sit down in a pasture an' shoot cows as to hang around waitin' for deer to walk up to the end o' your gun an' ask you polite-like to kill 'em. That kind o' huntin' ain't sport to me — it's slaughter. The longer it takes me to track a buck afore I finally nail him, the better I like it. It's givin' him some kind o' show to beat you at the wood-game.

BERKLEY: Tell that to some so-called sportsmen from the cities and they'll laugh at you. They're after game and don't care how they get it.

ABNER: Well, that kind ain't hunters — jess plain hogs. But you bring your friends up here this fall an' I'll see they get as many deer as the law allows — if I have to go out an' shoot ev'ryone of 'em myself. It wouldn't be the first time I've had to do it, an' I reckon mos' guides can tell you the same story.

BERKLEY (*laughing*): No doubt; and then the city-sports come back to town and brag of the game *they* have killed.

ABNER: Sure; but a guide is paid to shoot straight an' keep his mouth shut. (*Looking off*) But the sun is climbin' an' we've got to get across the lake, or you're apt to miss the stage. I don't want to hurry you, but I know you're anxious to get back to Noo York today.

BERKLEY: Yes; it's a case of must. I'll go in and see there's no delay. I heard Estelle's voice as we came by the back entrance; so it seems the girls returned all safe and sound.

ABNER: I wasn't worryin' none, for I'd trust Myra where I wouldn't trust myself in these diggin's.

BERKLEY: She's a fine girl, Kirke, and I know Estelle thinks the world of her. I hope she'll always remain the sweet, lovable child of nature that she is. City life wouldn't agree with her at all.

ABNER: No. I sent her to school down at Deer Lodge, but she soon kicked over the traces an' came home; so I had to hire a woman teacher to stay with us by spells an' got her educated that way. I was glad she wouldn't stay at school, for when she was gone the cabin seemed dead-like. Myra's pretty close to me, Mr. Berkley, for my son is away so much; an' if she ever left home, or anythin' happened to her — well, I reckon my cracked old heart wouldn't last long; I'd jess wilt an' go all to pieces — like an old buck that's been driv'n out from the herd an' has to beat the wood-paths by his lonesome.

BERKLEY: I know just how you feel, Kirke, for my daughter is also very close to me; and I dread the day when some man will take her away from me — which I suppose *will* happen — some time.

ABNER: Sure's you live. She's too fine a girl to trail along through life in single harness. She could make some man's home a heav'n on earth, an' I envy the cuss who'll finally get her; but he'll have to be *some man*, I'm a' thinkin', to win her.

BERKLEY: He'll certainly have to be something beyond a fortune-hunter or a cotillion-leader, or I'd be apt to step in and raise merry — hallelujah.

ABNER: That's the way I feel 'bout Myra. If she ever cottoned to a man that didn't use her right, I'd prob'ly break him in two an' throw the pieces to the wolves.

BERKLEY (*laughing*): I don't believe I'd care to be around and see what happened to the man that ran foul of you, Kirke. (*Going to house*) I'll go in and hustle them up. Want to come along?

ABNER: No, thanks. When my womenfolks 're fussin' 'round the house I gen'ra'ly takes to the tall timbers.

BERKLEY: Don't blame you. When my sister takes a fit to have a staff of house-cleaners at work down home I spend my nights at the club — to be out of harm's way.

(*Exits.*)

(*Abner walks up stage, looking off, frowning at delay.*)

(*Enter Gordon through arbor; goes toward house; Abner swings around alertly at noise he makes; Gordon shows nervousness upon seeing him.*)

ABNER (*without cordiality*): Hello, young man. I see your aunt got you up all right.

GORDON (*with a forced laugh*): Swell chance of staying in bed with a pitcher of cold water held over you by an angry woman.

ABNER: I 'spose it ain't my place to give you advice; but if you'd spent less time in bed and more of it in the open while here your muscles wouldn't be as flabby as they are. Your father could take you 'cross his knee right now an' give you the larrupin' of your life if he wanted to; an' if you'd 'a' been a son o' mine that's prob'ly what you'd 'a' got a good many times.

GORDON (*offended*): Mr. Kirke, I think such remarks are entirely uncalled-for.

ABNER: P'raps they be, but I've a sort o' habit spittin' out jess what I think; an' now that you're goin' away I want

to put a flea in your ear. I have the greatest respect for your father an' sister, but I ain't got a pile o' use for your kind o' men; an' if you come back here with your folks next summer, jess steer clear o' Myra 'r you'll have me to reckon with — an' that'd be somethin' like havin' a wildcat land on you —

GORDON (*interrupting*): Mr. Kirke, I —

ABNER: You jess keep quiet while I'm talkin'. I'm Myra's father, an' I've got a right to tell you a few things. You needn't think I've been stone blind to what's been goin' on here, but I don't think Myra's got much use for you at that; so I ain't alarmed none that she'd get mixed up with the likes o' you in this short time. But women 'r women the world over an' will of'en fall for a scallawag in spite o' themselves — if they beat the same trail too long. So now you jess stick this in your mem'ry: Next summer you chop out any talk with Myra, 'r I'm apt to make mince-meat o' you first an' do my thinkin' afterwards. That'll be 'bout all I've got to say to you.

(*Goes up stage, Gordon casting a furtive glance after him, then starting toward house.*)

(*Enter Estelle from house in travelling gown; does not see Abner at first.*)

ESTELLE: Where's Myra? I might have known you couldn't keep her interested enough to make her stay here until I came out. (*Seeing Abner, who comes down stage smiling genially.*) Ah, good morning, Mr. Kirke. Well, Myra and I stole a march on you, didn't we?

ABNER: So I understand. Bet you thought the fine view was well worth the hard climb in the dark.

ESTELLE: You win the bet. I'd be willing to take that climb every clear morning, but I'd have to lay in a good

supply of skirts in that case. (*To Gordon*) Where'd Myra go?

GORDON: Down toward the lake, I think.

ESTELLE: Of course. The further she could get away from you, the better she'd like it. (*To Abner, smilingly*) I left Myra in my wonderful brother's care while I went in to change my dress, but evidently she didn't find anything *wonderful* in his conversation, and decided to leave him to talk to himself, as all "geniuses" have a habit of doing.

(*Gordon goes into house with an angry gesture.*)

ABNER: You're kinder cuttin' to your brother, Miss Estelle. You two don't seem to jibe very good.

ESTELLE: Oh, pshaw! Let's talk about something more interesting than my lazy brother. Father told me he's coming up here hunting this fall, and you can be sure I'll be with him. You know Myra's taught me how to use a rifle this summer; so don't be surprised if we two beat you men in bringing in game — (*reflectively*) — though I'm wondering if I'll ever have the heart to shoot a deer. Those we've seen around here were so beautiful that it seems almost like a crime to kill one.

ABNER: Miss Estelle, I've killed a lot o' game in my time, but I've never yet drawn a bead on a deer that I didn't feel kinder guilty; an' I've never killed a doe intentionally, though sometimes it's hard to tell the bucks apart in the thick brush; an' I've of'en let a good chance go by when I've been in doubt. (*Sheepishly*) I 'spose it's foolish for an old hunter like me to feel that way, but it's the truth. I've killed bears an' lynxes an' wolves without thinkin' much 'bout 'em, but when it comes to deer I've always felt a bit squeemish. There's somethin' human-

like the way they look at you when you've brought 'em down.

ESTELLE (*throwing her arms around him impulsively*): That feeling is nothing to be ashamed of, for it comes from the bottom of your great, big, generous, fine-grained heart; and I respect you more than ever for this unconscious avowal. (*Abruptly, releasing him*) Pardon me, Mr. Kirke. I suppose you'll consider me rather bold for embracing you in this manner, but I really couldn't help it.

ABNER (*earnestly*): Anythin' you do, little woman, could never be very wrong, for you're clean-limbed an' clean-minded to the core; an' next to Myra — I'd like nothin' better 'n be able to claim you as a daughter.

ESTELLE: If I didn't own as good a father as I do, I'd be very glad to have you adopt me and let me stay here in the wilds the rest of my days.

ABNER: In that case you'd have little spendin' money an' less chance to spend it.

ESTELLE: That wouldn't bother me a particle. I don't use up half the allowance my father gives me.

ABNER: From what I've read 'bout 'em, I thought all city-womenfolks never could get 'nuff money to spend for clothes, gewgaws, jool'ry, an' suchlike onnecessary stuff; an' I kinder reckoned that's why so many of 'em got to side-trackin' in trails where they didn't b'long.

ESTELLE: You're right, Mr. Kirke. The desire for finery in dress and other personal adornment has brought more women to the verge of destruction than any cause — except, perhaps, — love. But money and money-making ventures never appealed to my nature, and neither do they to father. He likes to create new constructive work, accomplish difficult engineering feats, and things like that; but while his success has brought him good finan-

cial returns, his mind is above the sordid money-end of his vast business. He probably sacrificed a hundred thousand dollars by coming here this summer, but he has never once said he regretted it; and if he hadn't promised to return to the city I know he'd be willing to remain here for a month or two longer — and I'd be tickled to death if he could.

ABNER: An' I wouldn't shed any tears to have you here — not b'cause I'm rentin' the camp to you, but b'cause I like you both — more'n I can tell you.

ESTELLE: Coming from a true, whole-souled man like you, Mr. Kirke, that means a great deal; and I shall always look upon you as a sort of second father — and Myra a sister.

ABNER: Don't say any more, little girl, or you'll make it blamed hard to let you go. I know Myra's goin' to pine for you like a fawn that's lost its mother, an' she's prob'ly down by the lake cryin' her eyes out.

ESTELLE: Then I'll go right down and comfort her and meet you at the boat landing.

*(Goes toward Left.)*

*(Enter Myra through arbor; shows she has been weeping.)*

ABNER: Here she is now, — an' p'raps I wasn't right in telling you she's been off by herself havin' a good cry. Her face gives all the track-signs that she's been fillin' the lake.

ESTELLE *(coming down and embracing Myra, who breaks into sobs, hiding head and sinking down on settee)*: There, Myra. Don't take it so hard. We're coming back this fall, and next summer we'll be here for at least six months, if I have my way about it.

ABNER: That sounds good — if your father agrees to it.

ESTELLE: Father generally does as I request, and I'll see that he makes no business arrangements to prevent my

plans for next summer. (*Caressing Myra.*) We may not have Gordon with us then, but I guess we can manage to be happy without him; can't we, Myra? He never wanted to go along when we took our rambles through the woods, and we wouldn't have enjoyed his company anyway. You and I are going to have many a good time all by ourselves in the years to follow, you can be sure of that, Myra; so dry your tears, little girl, and the months will soon speed by. I'd like to take you down to the city with me, but I know you'd never feel at home there. —

ABNER: An' I'm afraid I'd have to put a copper on that proposition, for we could never get along without Myra. Ma Kirke would have a conniption fit if she thought o' such a thing, an' I'd prob'ly go off my head like a bull moose on the warpath. It'd be jess like takin' a lonely young bird from its nest an' leavin' the old ones to grieve their hearts out at the loss.

ESTELLE (*still comforting Myra, who remains sobbingly in her arms*): You dear old soul, I certainly don't want to rob your nest of its dearest treasure. That would be a cruel thing for anyone to do.

(*Enter Berkley, Gordon, Martha and Antonia from house, followed by maid and valet carrying grips, etc.; Berkley and Gordon each have a grip in hand.*)

BERKLEY: We're all ready, Kirke. (*To servants*) Take the grips down to the boat landing and we'll follow.

(*Exit maid and valet at Left.*)

ABNER: Brace up, Myra, an' don't show the white feather, now that they're ready to go. It ain't like you to go all to pieces this way.

(*Gordon glances furtively at Myra, while Others give her looks of pity for her supposed grief at leaving Estelle.*)

ESTELLE (*releasing Myra and assuming a jovial mood to distract her, Myra making a strong effort to control her emotions*): I'm sure you feel much better now, Myra. In a case like this there is nothing so good as a few tears to relieve a woman's heart. They soothe the wounds that partings cause, — and I'll probably have *my* solace in a similar way after we've boarded the train for New York; but I'm going to fight it off as long as I can.

GORDON: Oh, you'll shed buckets of tears all right when you think no one is looking.

ESTELLE (*tartly*): You'll never have the satisfaction of seeing any tears on *your* account, and I'll wager Myra feels the same way about the "Honorable" Gordon Berkley.  
(*Myra forces a smile, but avoids looking at Gordon.*)

BERKLEY: Say, are you two going to quarrel the last few minutes we're here?

ANTONIA: I believe they'd do that if they were both on the point of death.

ESTELLE: I've never *quarrelled* with Gordon, daddy, as I never deemed him worth the effort on my part. He's naturally too lazy to put up any kind of an argument and make a quarrel interesting.

GORDON: I'm going on ahead and escape listening to any more sarcasm from my would-be witty sister. I'll take your grip down to the landing, father.

(*Takes Berkley's grip away from him and hurries out at Left, carrying both grips; Others stare after him in surprise.*)

ESTELLE: Is the world coming to an end — when Gordon actually offers to carry two grips? Wonders will never cease here on earth, that's quite evident.

BERKLEY (*smiling*): Never saw him in such a hurry in my life.

ANTONIA: Perhaps he's made up his mind to turn over a new leaf.

ESTELLE: He'll have to turn over a *book* of leaves before I'll believe this sudden activity is genuine.

ABNER: I think we'd better follow the young man's lead an' hurry along ourselves. I'm gettin' a mite worried that Hank an' the stage 'll be gone if we don't reach the other side o' the lake pretty soon. When he took your trunks yesterday he hinted that he wouldn't wait too long to-day, an' a hint from Hank is as good as a kick from cranky mule.

BERKLEY: Then let us move along.

*(All but Myra go toward Left.)*

ESTELLE: Come on, Myra. You and I should beat Gordon down to the landing — even with the start he has. Are you game for a sprint?

MYRA: I — I prefer not to go to the landing, if you don't mind. I'd rather say good-bye — here.

*(Others stop in surprise.)*

ESTELLE: Why, I thought you were going to row across the lake with me in one of the boats!

MYRA: I'd — I'd rather not. It would only prolong the — the parting.

ABNER: I reckon I know how Myra feels, an' I'd let her have her own way, if I were you. She's always been a little shy on leave-takin's.

MARTHA: But you didn't say good-bye to the young man, Myra.

ESTELLE *(laughingly)*: She never got a chance — because of his sudden display of activity.

MYRA *(forcing a smile)*: Guess he won't mind that I didn't, and you can tell him from me that I hope — I hope you'll

have a pleasant journey to New York — and — and — that's all I can say.

*(Shakes hands with Antonia and Berkley, who make cordial ad lib. remarks of parting and wishing her well; then she embraces Estelle a little hysterically.)*

Good-bye, Estelle. Be sure and write me — once in a while.

ESTELLE: I certainly will. God keep you well and happy until I see you again, my dear, sweet friend of the wilds.

*(Kisses her with show of emotion.)* By-bye, little girl; by-bye!

*(Kisses her again and hurries out at Left, Myra turning away with a sob.)*

*(Abner motions to Others to follow Estelle; they exit; Abner makes move to go to Myra and comfort her, but changes his mind; exits abruptly after a pitying look at his daughter, who goes to settee, sinking down in same and sobbing bitterly.)*

MYRA *(checking sobs after a few moments, speaking in tone of self-reproach)*: Oh, Estelle! if you only knew how it hurts me to deceive you!

*(Bows head, pressing hand to bosom, as Paul enters from beyond house in travelling suit, carrying small grip, he seeing her, but she unaware of his arrival. Paul is smiling as he enters, but sobers up on seeing her attitude. Myra looks up again, staring straight in front of her, speaking intensely.)*

Oh, what a mistake I've made! Why, oh, why did you ever come into my life, Gordon Berkley? And why did I ever listen to you? Why didn't someone warn me of my danger? —

*(Stops abruptly, hearing Paul behind her, he coming down stage with an apprehensive look at what he has heard.)*

*She leaps up; swings around; runs to him with a cry of amazement.)*

Paul! — brother!

*(Throws herself hysterically into his arms, he dropping grip, tenderly stroking her hair as he bends over and kisses her.)*

PAUL (*sadly*): And I've come home after a year's absence to find my little sister in tears.

MYRA (*looking up with a forced smile*): But you won't see any more — now that you're here; but how could you arrive without our knowing it?

PAUL: I wanted to surprise you. I came up the back trail as far as Mark Henly's last night, but as it was dark then, I didn't want to chance it over the mountain paths; so I waited until daylight this morning to make the rest of the way. Father and mother well?

MYRA: Oh, yes — and they'll be just tickled to death to see you, Paul. Mother's down by the cabin now, very likely, but father is taking our summer guests across the lake to catch the stage. We'll go down and surprise mother.

*(Makes move to go.)*

PAUL: Wait a moment, Myra. When I came around the house you were crying, and I heard what you said — when you thought you were alone —

MYRA (*interrupting nervously*): You mustn't mind anything I said, Paul. I was sorry to have our summer guests leave so soon, and I suppose I made some foolish remarks — in fact, I don't remember just what I did say.

PAUL: But I do. You're not a good story teller, Myra, and never were. You've always been frank and open with me — (*sighing grimly*) — and now I want the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth — as to what Gordon Berkley is, or has been, to you this summer. I came directly from New York last night. While there I

made some inquiries about the Berkleys, and I heard many things regarding the son that were not to his credit — and I cut all matters short to get home, but evidently I have arrived too late.

MYRA (*shrinking away from him with a shudder*): Paul! — don't look at me that way — I didn't know — didn't understand — and you must not despise me, Paul, or it will kill me! —

PAUL (*taking her into his arms, she sobbing*): Despise you — my little innocent sister! Never! If father, mother, the whole world turned against you in this hour of your greatest trouble, I'd still stand by you — and fight for you — until I dropped dead! No matter what has happened, I can never blame you; for you were but a child whom an experienced rake easily beguiled. To me you are as pure today as you were when I was home last summer, but if you ever needed a brother's protecting arm, now is the time; and I'm going to right your wrongs before many days have passed by.

MYRA (*apprehensively*): What do you intend to do, Paul?

PAUL: There is but one thing to do. Our ancestors' law of the wilds demanded "an eye for an eye; a limb for a limb" — and I'm going to invoke that law. I wanted to stay home for a month, but now I've got to go and kill a snake.

MYRA: No, no! You must not think of it! To take his life would be wrong, Paul, for I consider myself equally to blame!

PAUL: You can never make me take that viewpoint. You're not the first girl he has fooled, but you shall be the last one.

MYRA: And you would wreck your whole future — bring disgrace upon your father and mother — by such actions? No, Paul. I'll manage to live down my personal disgrace — some way — but you must not add to it.

PAUL: But, Myra, I —

MYRA (*interrupting determinedly*): Listen to me, Paul. If you don't promise me, here and now, to make no attempt upon Gordon Berkley's life, you'll find my drowned body in the lake at the first opportunity.

PAUL (*staggered*): Good God, Myra! You can't mean that!

MYRA: As there is a heaven above us, I do — unless you give me your solemn promise; for I know you'll keep it, once it is given.

PAUL: Do you love him, Myra?

MYRA: I thought I did — when he first came here, but now I'm in doubt; I don't know — I can't explain what my feelings toward him are — even to myself — and that has nothing to do with the case as far as you are concerned. I admire and respect his father and sister highly, and they shall not be made to suffer through any fault of mine. I am waiting for your answer, Paul.

PAUL: You're asking too much of me, Myra.

MYRA: Is it asking too much of my brother to let me live — in spite of the disgrace I shall always feel?

PAUL (*vehemently*): I believe you're placing this alternative before me to save the Berkleys from disgrace.

MYRA: I admit it — frankly, but I am also trying to save my brother from becoming a murderer and bringing sorrow and grief upon his aged parents. I am waiting, Paul,— waiting for your answer.

PAUL (*after a few moments' pause, sighing*): I give you the promise you request, Myra.

MYRA (*relieved*): Thank God!

(*Sinks down on her knees devoutly as*

CURTAIN FALLS.

END OF ACT I.

ACT II



## A C T II

(Three months later)

*Scene*—DRAWING ROOM OF THE BERKLEYS' NEW YORK HOME

Room sumptuously furnished, with doors at Center and Left; at Right a grand piano; a stack of sheet music on piano, with a small oval gilt frame containing snap-shot of a girl.

CURTAIN RISES, disclosing MAID finishing with dusting and rearranging furniture.

Enter ANTONIA at Left, in evening gown.

ANTONIA (*glancing around fussily*): Very good, Annette.

You might go into the library and straighten up a bit, in case Mr. Berkley should decide to take our guest in there for a chat.

(*Maid bows and goes to Left.*)

And then you can give the smoking room a little going over. Possibly the men will wish to enjoy a cigar or two.

(*Maid bows and is about to open door.*)

And you might go to my room and pick up a little;

(*Maid bows again and opens door.*)

and don't forget Estelle's room; she always leaves it in a mess after she's through dressing, you know.

(*Maid bows again, but makes no move to go, as if expecting further orders.*)

That will be about all I can think of just now.

(*Maid turns, showing relief.*)

Oh, by the way, you'd better look into Gordon's room when you're through with the others — if he isn't occupying it. He's worse than Estelle in scattering his things around. That's all.

*(Maid bows again; shows weary expression as she goes out, closing door.)*

*(Antonia gives closer inspection to Maid's work.)*

*(Estelle enters at Center in evening gown; carries an open letter in hand; shows agitation.)*

ESTELLE: Oh, aunty! I've just made a fearful discovery. *(Giving letter to Antonia.)* I found this letter in the hallway upstairs — where Gordon must have dropped it accidentally, for naturally he'd never want any of us to know how cruelly he has wronged that poor little girl up in the Adirondacks. Bad as he is, I never dreamed that he could be so base and heartless. Poor, miserable Myra must have written to him repeatedly, but evidently he has ignored her letters. Oh, what a scoundrel of a brother I have!

ANTONIA *(looking up from letter with horrified expression)*: Good gracious! I can scarcely believe my eyesight!

ESTELLE: Neither could I — when I picked it up and gave it a glance to see if it was anything worth saving. I'm so glad none of the servants or father chanced to see it — and we must keep this from him by all means, or the shock might bring back his old trouble — and that might mean his death.

ANTONIA *(sadly, giving letter to Estelle)*: My poor brother Calvin certainly has a heavy cross to bear with such a son. Gambling, horse-racing, drinking — and now *this* on top of it all.

ESTELLE *(vehemently)*: What Gordon needs is a good horse-whipping — if not worse.

ANTONIA: But how foolish of Myra to —

ESTELLE: Don't say a word against her, aunty. I have nothing but pity for Myra Kirke — of whose child-like innocence Gordon took a cowardly advantage. I now

understand why she refused to go down to the boat landing to see us off the morning we left the camp. The poor, brave little girl took the best way of avoiding an embarrassing situation; and from her letter you can see that she would never have written Gordon at all, if she hadn't later discovered — (*abruptly, crumpling letter in her hands*).—Oh, why should there be such miserable men in this world, and why should my own brother be one of them?

(*Walks around in agitation.*)

ANTONIA: You must calm yourself, Estelle. Mr Weston will soon be here, and you won't be fit to receive him if you dwell upon this subject.

ESTELLE (*with an effort to check her agitation*): I know it. But much as I like Mr. Weston, I wish he weren't coming here tonight,—though father invited him for a little private business talk.

ANTONIA (*meaningly*): But I have an idea that your father rather likes to have you meet the clever young man frequently—perhaps you know why better than I do.

ESTELLE (*a little confused*): Oh, don't talk nonsense, aunty. Father admires Mr. Paul Weston greatly because of his skill as a civil engineer.

ANTONIA: But he has only been employed in the Berkley Construction Company for a little over two months —

ESTELLE: Yes; and in that short time he has already saved the concern many thousands of dollars by his clever planning of new constructive work; and, as I am more or less interested in engineering matters, it is quite natural for father to invite him here where we can discuss matters informally.

ANTONIA (*dryly*): H'm. I suppose so. And yet we know very little about the young man.

ESTELLE: He came from Chicago well recommended, but his work has proven that he is one of the finest engineers in the country, and that goes further with daddy than all the recommendations in the world.

ANTONIA: And evidently his daughter takes the same view.

ESTELLE: What if I do? Have you anything against Mr. Weston, aunty?

ANTONIA: No; but the acquaintance is rather short to admit this employee and comparative stranger into our home life; and society frowns upon such things —

ESTELLE: Oh, society be switched! You know I mingle very little with so-called society and care less what they think or say about me; — (*semi-sarcastically*) — and father and I decided long ago to let you carry off all the society honors for the family, aunty.

ANTONIA (*snappishly*): There will be few honors to carry off — if Gordon continues in his present course. When this new escapade become noised abroad we won't any of us dare to show our faces among friends and acquaintances.

ESTELLE: We certainly shall, for Gordon will have to do the right thing by Myra Kirke.

ANTONIA: You mean — he must marry her?

ESTELLE: Of course. That is the *only* thing he can do, but I pity the poor girl for being compelled to take a cad like him for a husband.

ANTONIA: Don't call your brother a cad, Estelle.

ESTELLE: Has he ever been anything else? He is worse than a cad — in beguiling that little innocent child. Oh, I can't find words strong enough to condemn him! If I

were a brother to him, instead of sister, I'd be tempted to wring his neck!

ANTONIA: Hush, Estelle! It's very unladylike to talk that way.

ESTELLE: I don't care. When I think of that poor little girl up there in the mountains — heartbroken and forsaken — my blood boils to avenge her wrongs; for I feel partly to blame in suggesting to father to take Gordon along on our vacation. If we'd left him in the city — no matter what happened to him — Myra Kirke wouldn't be in the deplorable situation she now finds herself. But Gordon shall learn that for once he has overstepped all bounds.

ANTONIA: But suppose he refuses to —

ESTELLE: He'd better not,— or he'll force me to do something desperate.

ANTONIA: What can you do — when you don't dare to tell your father?

ESTELLE: Don't ask me any questions, aunty. My plans are rather vague as yet, but I intend to arouse Gordon to a sense of justice — if I have to jeopardize my own honor in the attempt to right the hideous wrong to the little girl who couldn't be dearer to me than she is if she were my own sister; and I hold her blameless in my mind — no matters what others may think.

ANTONIA: But you know our set could never accept her upon equal terms, even though Gordon marries her —

ESTELLE: Then "our set" can go to — Halifax — as far as I am concerned. If ever a girl needed a stanch friend, poor Myra Kirke does today, and I propose to show her that friendship means something to me beyond mere words. Any person that points the finger of scorn at Myra will be cut out from my visiting list for all time.

ANTONIA: Oh, dear! I'm afraid you've undertaken an impossible task.

ESTELLE: That remains to be seen, aunty. All I ask of you is to be careful that father doesn't suspect anything until after Gordon has married Myra, when I shall broach the subject to daddy judiciously.

ANTONIA: What a blow this will be to my poor brother.

ESTELLE (*putting letter in bosom*): Another thing, aunty. Don't let Gordon understand that you are aware of my finding the letter. I want him to think that I am the only one in the house who knows of his rascality.

ANTONIA: I'll gladly agree to that. I couldn't bear to meet him if I thought he knew that you had shown the letter to me.

(*Enter Gordon at Left; Estelle assumes usual demeanor, while Antonia turns away to hide her feelings.*)

GORDON: Estelle, may I see you in the library for a moment?

ESTELLE: If you have any eyesight you can see me right here.

GORDON (*with a side glance at Antonia*): But I — I —

ESTELLE (*laughing forcedly*): Aunty, Gordon doesn't want to tell you to get out; he's too much of a gentleman for that; but he means he'd like you to leave the room just the same.

(*Gordon makes an impatient gesture at Estelle's banter.*)

ANTONIA (*frigidly*): I shall be only too glad to remove myself from his presence.

(*Walks out stiffly.*)

ESTELLE: Now you can use your eyesight without embarrassment. Is this going to be a "touching" scene? Since father cut down your allowance you rarely hunt me up unless it's to ask for money.

GORDON: Oh, don't be so sarcastic. You know what I get now wouldn't keep a canary bird in spending money, and I'm in the hole at the club.

ESTELLE: And you want me to pull you out of the hole, don't you? It's such a brotherly thing to ask of a sister. How much do you need to pay your gambling debts?

GORDON: Oh, I've had a rotten run of luck lately. It'll take about a hundred to clear me at the club; and say, Estelle, if you'll help me out this time I'll promise to cut out cards for a good while.

ESTELLE: Don't make any promises, for you never kept one in your life.

GORDON (*whiningly*): What's the use of "rubbing it in" to me all the time, sis, the way you do? I'm no worse than the rest of the fellows at the club.

ESTELLE: I think you are — in fact, I *know* you are.

GORDON: In what way?

ESTELLE: I prefer not to enter into details. Your code of morals is not a pleasant topic for discussion between brother and sister.

GORDON (*gloomily*): I suppose this is a preamble to your refusal to help me out.

ESTELLE: No-o; I'm going to surprise you in many ways tonight, Gordon. I intend to be very generous with you as far as finances are concerned.

GORDON (*brightening up*): Indeed! Then it must be because you're in a good mood on account of this Weston being expected here this evening. I haven't had the pleasure of meeting the gentleman yet; but from the praises you and father are forever sounding about him, he must be a wonder.

ESTELLE: It would be worth your while to cultivate Mr.

Weston's acquaintance, for he is a real man — one you could copy after to good advantage.

GORDON: You must be getting "struck" on him, sis.

ESTELLE (*sharply*): We'll dispense with any slangy reference as to my regard for Mr. Weston, if you please, or I shall be compelled to leave the room.

GORDON: Oh, come; can't you take a joke?

ESTELLE: I can — when there's any joke in sight; but I fail to see a particle of humor in the coarse remark you just made.

GORDON: I stand corrected, sis; and beg your pardon.

ESTELLE: Which you wouldn't do if you didn't expect to get some more money out of me.

(*Gordon bites lips with chagrin.*)

In spite of father's disapproval I have given you financial aid many times, but tonight I'm going to be especially liberal to you — provided you agree to something I want you to do.

GORDON: Why, of course I'll be only too glad to return the favor in any way I can.

ESTELLE: I'm pleased to hear you say that, and I hope you mean it.

GORDON: Just tell me what you want me to do and I'll show you whether I mean it or not.

ESTELLE: Very well; I'll give you my check for five hundred dollars — which you can cash at your club, settle your debts there, and still have about four hundred left, I believe, from what you said. Am I right?

GORDON (*amazed*): Yes; but say, sis, you're certainly taking my breath away. Guess I've misjudged you. You're a real good sport after all, Stel.

ESTELLE (*with a little grim smile*): Perhaps you won't consider me such a "sport" when you hear the proviso.

GORDON: What do you want me to do — go out and slug somebody who's insulted you?

ESTELLE (*dryly*): Hardly. If I wanted any "slugging" done I'd have to hire a thug for the purpose, as I don't think you possess either the brute courage or enough physical ability to resent an insult — even to your sister.

GORDON (*with assumed bravado*): You just try me and find out.

ESTELLE: Perhaps I will — some day.

GORDON: Don't beat around any more, Stel. What is it you want me to do?

ESTELLE (*slowly, looking at him fixedly*): I want you to go to the club tonight; pay your debts there and resign from membership; then return home early and obtain a good night's rest, and be prepared to take the first train in the morning to catch the stage for Kirke's Cove in the Adirondacks.

GORDON: Good Lord, sis! Why should I go up to that bleak wilderness?

ESTELLE: You are going up there to marry Myra Kirke.

GORDON (*staggered*): Marry — Myra Kirke! — Why should I do that?

ESTELLE (*with an expression of disgust*): You know why — better than I do.

GORDON: Has she — has she written you? —

ESTELLE: I haven't heard from Myra for some time, and I have been wondering at her silence. Now I happen to know the reason she has avoided writing to me.

GORDON: What do you know about — about anything — unless she has written to you?

ESTELLE (*pointing an accusing finger at him*): A guilty conscience needs no accuser. Your own actions now convict you, and I am judging you accordingly.

GORDON (*blusteringly*): You're judging me wrongly, in that case. Myra Kirke is nothing to me, and if she is making accusations of — anything — my word is as good as hers, and I deny that she has any hold on me.

ESTELLE: Oh, you contemptible cur! By what freak of nature could an upright man like father have a scoundrel of a son like you!

GORDON: If you're going to heap abuse upon me I'd better get out.

ESTELLE: You'll remain here until I'm through, or I'll lay the whole matter before father tonight — and that will end you in this house. Then you'd either have to go to work and earn a living or starve to death, and as you are absolutely unfit for any employment you can guess where you'd finally land — in a tramp's early grave.

GORDON: And you'd be the cause of that? Don't expect me to swallow such rot. You think too much of the name of Berkley to make us a laughing stock. And as far as marrying Myra is concerned — that's out of the question. She's too far beneath our station in life.

ESTELLE (*vehemently*): But she was good enough for you to beguile, deceive and betray under a promise of marriage! —

GORDON (*sharply*): You must have been prying around in my correspondence to have discovered all this —  
(*Checks himself.*)

ESTELLE: Don't judge others by your own standard. I'm not in the habit of "prying around."

GORDON: How else could you have learned anything about Myra? — and mind you, I don't admit being at fault, no matter *what* you think you've found out.

ESTELLE: No; you're not man enough for that; but you're

going to marry that little innocent girl, mark what I tell you.

GORDON: You'll have a swell time trying to arrange such a match. If you told father—he'd probably disinherit me, but I don't think you dare to do it; for very likely he'd get another shock, and that would kill him. As for Myra's innocence — Bah!

ESTELLE: Oh, what a miserable cad you are! I wish I were a man — just for five minutes — and I'd beat you until you begged for mercy.

GORDON (*flippanly*): But as you happen to be a woman I can feel easy, I suppose.

ESTELLE: Don't goad me too far, Gordon. I haven't dissipated my strength away like you, and if you say another word derogatory to Myra's character I'm quite apt to — (*Steps toward him aggressively.*)

GORDON (*edging away*): Why all this fuss over a casual acquaintance of a summer vacation? If what you're hinting at were true — as you evidently believe it is — I should think you'd be glad to drop her from your mind.

ESTELLE: As you have done — after accomplishing the worst evil of your worthless existence. But I want you to understand that I attach little blame to Myra, for in her child-like innocence she became an easy victim to your experienced guile; and my heart goes out to her in sincere pity that she had to run foul of a snake like you!

GORDON: Nice names you're calling your brother.

ESTELLE: Everything I've called you fits your characteristics perfectly. Could there be a worse specimen of manhood than you are? Even though you promised Myra you'd marry her, you've entirely ignored her letters wherein she pleads with you to keep your promise.—

GORDON: How do you know all this — unless you've ransacked my room?

ESTELLE: I haven't been near your room — couldn't bear its atmosphere for an instant, with the lingering aroma of stale cigarette butts and nauseating whiskey-smell pervading every nook and corner of it, no matter how much airing the maid gives it when you're out.

GORDON: The room suits me —

ESTELLE: Of course it does. Filth delights in filth.

*(As Gordon makes angry gesture.)*

But I'll tell you how I discovered your perfidy toward Myra Kirke. You carelessly dropped her last letter in the upper hallway, and it was fortunate that I was the person to find it — instead of the servants.

GORDON *(flustered)*: You had no business to read the letter — if you did find it.

ESTELLE: It was a loose sheet that I picked up. If it had been in an envelope I should never have looked at it.

GORDON: Where's the letter now?

ESTELLE *(indicating bosom)*: Here — next to my heart — lies the tear-stained sheet — with the cry of mental agony exuding from every line the poor girl wrote.

GORDON: Kindly hand it over; it belongs to me.

ESTELLE: No; it now belongs to me, — by the right of having found it, — though nothing would please me better than to have you try to take it away from me.

GORDON: Oh, you're looking for a chance to scratch my eyes out, I presume; but I won't give you the opportunity. Keep it as long as you like.

ESTELLE: I shall — until you've married Myra Kirke.

GORDON: Then I'll never get the letter back, that's sure.

ESTELLE: Perhaps not. *(Changing mood)* Gordon, if I thought you had a spark of manhood in your make-up I'd

get down on my knees and plead with you to do what is right by Myra; but knowing you as well as I do, I realize it would be useless to appeal for justice from a man of your stamp. (*Turning away with a sigh*) Kindly leave the room — and let me be alone — with my grief.

GORDON (*hesitatingly*): I don't suppose you'll help me out now —

ESTELLE (*swinging back*): I told you what I'd do. My offer still awaits your acceptance — upon the terms stated; and I'll go further: I'll give you practically my whole allowance to live upon if you'll marry Myra.

GORDON: That's out of the question. Why, I'd be a joke among my friends and acquaintances. I'd never dare to show myself at the club — or anywhere else.

ESTELLE: What a miserable, selfish creature you are. You haven't a thought for the plight of the poor girl you have wronged. Go! — before I lose my self-control!

GORDON: But couldn't you let me have the hundred for my club debts?

ESTELLE: Not one penny for anything save the purpose I stated.

GORDON (*doggedly*): If you refuse to help me out I'm apt to do something desperate.

ESTELLE: I don't care what you do — or what becomes of you — when you decline to even try to be some sort of an apology for a man. To me you are a brother no longer. Go!

GORDON: You'll regret this, Estelle.

ESTELLE: My regrets need not trouble you. (*Going to Center*) Seeing you won't leave the room, I shall have to do so to end this useless discussion. But please do not remain here when our guest arrives.

GORDON: Oh, I'll get out. You needn't leave on my account.  
(*Going to Left*) But if I go straight to the dogs from now on you can blame yourself, — that's all.

(*Exits.*)

(*Estelle glances after him with aversion, then sighs; goes to piano; picks up photo; stares at it intently.*)

ESTELLE (*speaking to photo with emotion*): You poor child; how I pity you; and in order to arouse my brother to a sense of justice, little girl, I'm going to compromise myself with the man I love — and then I'll probably lose him — but I'll do it — I'll do it — for your sake — if it breaks my heart!

(*Kisses photo reverently; replaces it on piano; leans over top of same and buries face in hands with a heavy sob.*)

BERKLEY (*outside at Center*): I guess we'll find her in the drawing room.

(*Estelle straightens up abruptly; dries her eyes hastily and prepares to receive the guest.*)

(*Enter Berkley and Paul at Center; Berkley in smoking jacket; Paul in street suit.*)

ESTELLE (*stepping up to meet them, shaking hands with Paul smilingly*): I was afraid you weren't coming, Mr. Weston, although father said you'd be here.

PAUL (*reservedly*): A little accident on the "L" detained me, or I should have arrived earlier.

BERKLEY (*genially*): Then you'll have to stay a little later to make up for it.

ESTELLE: Where's aunty, father?

BERKLEY: Annette told me she has one of her customary headaches and won't be able to come downstairs this evening. (*To Paul*) My sister is subject to such attacks, so you'll have to put up with our company — in fact, I'm going to leave you to the tender mercies of my

daughter for a little while, as there is a matter I want to attend to immediately. (*To Estelle*) Is Gordon in the house?

ESTELLE: I believe so; he's probably up in his room.

BERKLEY: Glad of that; I want to see him. (*To Paul*) You'll pardon my leaving you for a few minutes, but my daughter can be a good entertainer when she wants to be, and I sha'n't be gone long. Estelle, you play for him. He told me at the office that he enjoyed your music the last time he was here.

PAUL: I certainly did.

BERKLEY: Then I have no fear that she'll bore you — as she does me sometimes with her piano-playing. I'm afraid I was born without the proper appreciation for music.

ESTELLE (*laughingly*): You surely were, father. The only thing in the line of music that you can appreciate is the ringing chorus of thousands of hammers, sledged and riveting machines in mammoth construction work. Any less noisier musical instruments are entirely lost upon your delicate sense of hearing.

BERKLEY: Isn't she delightfully sarcastic, Paul? You'd better look out for her, or she'll rip you all to pieces if she gets the least chance.

ESTELLE (*with mock reproachfulness*): Now, father, don't make me out worse than I am. Mr. Weston is apt to think I'm a virago, if you say too much; and you surely ought to shield your daughter's failings.

BERKLEY: I would — if you had any "failings" to shield, — but I can't find any. (*To Paul*) As she lost her mother when a mere baby I've had to be both father and mother since then, and she comes pretty near being my

greatest treasure; so in leaving her to entertain you, I'm offering you the best my house affords.

*(Estelle shakes a chiding finger at her father.)*

PAUL: And I appreciate it, Mr. Berkley.

BERKLEY: Our acquaintance is short, but I want you to feel perfectly at home here, as I have a great deal of confidence in you, or I should never have invited you to my house. But to tell you the truth, after you met my daughter at the office several times, it was at her suggestion that you received the first invitation. —

ESTELLE *(smilingly, though a trifle confused)*: Now, daddy, you're giving me dead away. For the shrewd business man that you are, you certainly make some awful blunders. You'd better leave before you "put your foot in it" any further.

BERKLEY *(going to Left, laughing)*: You see; she wants to get rid of me and have you all to herself. —

ESTELLE: Daddy, if you don't stop, I'll —

BERKLEY: I'm off, — but I'll soon return. Until then be on your guard, Paul.

*(Exits, chuckling.)*

ESTELLE: You mustn't mind what father says. He's the dearest daddy in all the world, but he's bound to have his fun at my expense. *(Turning to piano)* What shall I play for you? Is there any particular composer that you prefer to hear?

PAUL *(following her to piano)*: Really, I haven't any preference, — although I am, perhaps, more partial to American composers than to foreign ones. —

*(Unnoticed by Estelle he gives a start upon seeing Myra's photo on piano.)*

ESTELLE: Then I shall play some of MacDowell's composi-

tions. (*Hunts through music pile entirely unaware of Paul's strained attitude as he stares at photo*) If I can find it, there's one called "To a Wild Rose" that is delightfully simple, but exquisitely beautiful.

PAUL (*recovering composure, picking up photo, speaking casually*): Who is this young lady, if I may ask?

ESTELLE (*looking up, speaking soberly*): That is a snap-shot of a girl I met this summer up in the Adirondacks. Her name is Myra Kirke. (*Abruptly*) I wish I could find that piece of music.

(*Begins turning over music again to avoid further questions.*)

PAUL (*misunderstanding her motive in dropping subject, stares at Estelle reproachfully for an instant; then, looking at photo, speaks casually again*): Your description of the MacDowell composition, "To a Wild Rose," might fit the original of this photograph, if I am judging it rightly.

ESTELLE (*briefly, busy with music*): Yes; you're quite right. She's a beautiful child of Nature's wilds — simple and unaffected — a true wild rose.

PAUL (*reflectively, still looking at photo*): And wild roses are often plucked by ruthless hands and wantonly destroyed.

ESTELLE (*dropping music and staring at him in amazement*): Why, one would almost suppose that you knew — that you knew her. What prompted you to make that remark?

PAUL (*laughing it off, putting photo back on piano nonchalantly*): Oh, I have a bad habit of trying to read people's characteristics from their pictures and making crazy prognostications.

ESTELLE: Hardly crazy. You seem to possess strange powers of divination — (*breaking off abruptly with a forced laugh*) — I'm going after a picture of her father and show it to you. I snapped him unawares this summer, as he has a de-

cided aversion to camera reproductions. (*Going to Left*)  
Pardon me for leaving you for a few moments.

(*Exits.*)

(*Paul looks after her frowningly, then picks up photo again, staring at it tenderly.*)

PAUL (*speaking to photo, with grim expression*): Guess she doesn't care to talk much about you, Myra. You don't belong to her set — though her brother considered you good enough to betray. But I'm going to avenge your dishonor, sister mine, by delivering a blow of "poetic justice" through the daughter of this house.

(*Replaces photo and turns over music listlessly.*)

ESTELLE (*entering at Left, with snap-shot mounted on cardboard*): This is the only one I was able to get of him. Now let me hear you read *his* characteristics, Mr. Clairvoyant.

PAUL (*taking picture, looking at it casually*): That's a good snap-shot — very clear. The light must have been excellent when you took it.

ESTELLE: It was, and he doesn't know to this day that I caught him. But tell me what you think of the man?

PAUL (*with assumed study of picture*): He's a fine, rugged, old backwoods' type, I should judge; honest and square as a die; but God help the man who might injure his daughter. There would come a fearful day of reckoning for that luckless individual — if he ever dreamed anything was wrong.

ESTELLE (*gaspingly*): Gracious! I'm really afraid of your uncanny gifts. You have read him perfectly. (*Trying to laugh it off*) I'd never dare to show you a picture of myself.

PAUL (*handing back snap-shot, looking at her intently*): Having the original before me, I don't need a picture.

ESTELLE (*roguishly, but a trifle confused by his stare*): Then, if you'll promise to be lenient with my idiosyncrasies, I'd like to have you tell me what you think of — the original.

PAUL: I don't dare to do that.

ESTELLE: Why?

PAUL: Because you are the daughter of a man of wealth whose employee I happen to be.

ESTELLE: What has that to do with it?

PAUL: Everything. It would be the height of presumption on my part to enter into any familiar delineation of your characteristics.

ESTELLE: Nonsense. I believed you to be broad-minded enough to realize that mere money cuts no figure with either father or myself; and when we invited you to visit our home, we certainly didn't want you to feel the slightest degree of inferiority.

PAUL: If I didn't appreciate that fact I wouldn't be here; but rank and station have certain obligations nevertheless.—

ESTELLE: Oh, rank and station fiddlesticks! What do most of the men — and the women, too, for that matter — in so-called high society amount to in this world? Their great wealth enables them to live a life of ease and self-indulgence, but strip them of their wealth and throw them on their own resources, and what would be the result? They'd fall by the wayside like broken reeds, unable to hold their heads up for an instant in the struggle for existence. Isn't that true?

PAUL: I presume it is — to a great extent.

ESTELLE: Of course it's true. But with men like you — and father — it is entirely different. Plant either of you in a barren desert — with little or no money to aid you — and your brains and energy would soon create a paradise

out of the bleakest wilds. (*Laughingly, as he stares at her in amazement*) There! Now I have given you a frank eulogy. Let me hear you state as frankly what you think of me.

PAUL: Do you want me to tell you exactly what my thoughts are?

ESTELLE: Of course I do — (*roguishly*) — provided you don't intend to tear me to pieces — too much.

PAUL (*suddenly stepping over and catching her in his arms, crushing her to him fiercely*): This is what I think of you! (*Kisses her repeatedly, she, taken by surprise, offering little resistance.*)

ESTELLE (*releasing herself and trying to carry the affair off lightly, though somewhat shocked at his actions*): My goodness! but you are strenuous! You certainly believe in energetic methods—whether making social or commercial conquests; but that is your nature, I presume, so must be overlooked.

PAUL (*with assumed meekness*): Then you really forgive me for my sudden madness?

ESTELLE: I'll either have to do that or forbid you coming here again, and the latter alternative would be rather harsh — and would require considerable explanation to my father — something I have no desire to make.

PAUL: I am deeply grateful to you for your condescension.

ESTELLE: We'll forget the incident and not refer to it again. That is best — under the circumstances.

PAUL (*with usual reserve*): It is.

ESTELLE (*laughingly, trying to put him at ease*): But do you know — I received a most remarkable answer to my request for a — for a eulogy — in return for the one I gave you.

PAUL: I thought you wished us to drop the subject —

ESTELLE: So I did, — but women, you know, are proverbially changeable.

PAUL (*stepping forward*): Then shall we reopen it?

ESTELLE (*warding him off in alarm*): No, no! One experience of that kind was quite sufficient, thank you — at least, for the present.

PAUL: Then I may hope that in the future you —

ESTELLE (*interrupting a little uneasily*): We'll let the future take care of itself.

PAUL (*deciding to bring his revenge plan to a culmination*): But would it be asking too much — that you go to some theatre with me — say, tomorrow night — and then a little “supper for two” afterward?

(*Estelle is shocked for an instant, but remembering her own resolution to arouse her brother she decides to accept the rather bold invitation.*)

ESTELLE: Perhaps — why not?

PAUL (*trying to conceal his elation at finding her falling in with his plans*): Then I'm to understand — you're willing? —

ESTELLE (*slowly*): Yes. I shall be ready to accompany you — if you call for me tomorrow evening.

PAUL: Thank you. I'll surely come — and make all arrangements beforehand. (*Looking toward Left*) If I could say good-bye to Mr. Berkley — I'd cut my visit short — in anticipation of tomorrow evening's pleasure.

ESTELLE: I'll go and call father.

(*Starts toward Left, as Berkley and Gordon enter at Left, the latter sullen and bored.*)

BERKLEY (*as they enter*): Paul, I've brought my son Gordon to introduce to you. I thought it might do him good to get acquainted with you.

PAUL (*stiffening up at sight of Gordon, but trying to be coldly affable*): Pleased to meet your son, Mr. Berkley.

*(Bows, but makes no move to shake hands with Gordon, who comes forward for that purpose and shows a little chagrin at unconscious rebuff.)*

ESTELLE *(noticing Paul's omission and ascribing it to an instinctive dislike to her brother and secretly approving it)*: Glad you came in, father, as Mr. Weston was just on the point of leaving.

BERKLEY *(unconscious of slight to Gordon)*: What! — leaving — so soon?

PAUL: Yes; I just recalled that I brought some plans home from the office, and I want to look them over before I retire. *(Going to Center, turning with respective bows to Others)* I'll see you in the morning, Mr. Berkley; and you in the evening, Miss Berkley.

*(Bows distantly to Gordon and exits abruptly.)*  
*(Others stare after him somewhat puzzled at his sudden leave-taking.)*

BERKLEY: Have you said anything to offend him, Estelle, to make him leave so abruptly?

ESTELLE: Not that I know of; but he is naturally a very reserved young man — not at all demonstrative — and perhaps he didn't realize his sudden method of leaving. *(Reflectively)* He seems to speak — and act — rather impulsively — at times.

GORDON: If you want *my* opinion of him, I think he's an ill-bred boor. Evidently he doesn't know enough to shake hands with a person to whom he is introduced.

ESTELLE: I believe that was simply an oversight on his part.

GORDON: But I believe it was done deliberately — for some reason I can't understand. The men from the West never have any manners, anyway, and he seems to be a fair specimen of the "wild and woolly" type — the regular sword-swallowing kind at a dinner table. I can't

grasp why you and father have been praising him up so highly — now that I've seen him.

ESTELLE (*spiritedly*): That's because you can't see much in anybody beyond your egotistical self. If you were only the tenth part of the man that he is, you might *be* something in this world but a dissipated rake —

(*Checks herself in realizing that she has said more than she intended in her father's presence.*)

(*Gordon shrinks away from her, then exits abruptly, in fear that she may say something worse about him if he remains.*)

BERKLEY (*chidingly*): Don't you think that was saying a little too much, Estelle? I know Gordon is not what he ought to be, and I have just taken him to task for his behavior, but "dissipated rake" is a pretty hard term for a sister to throw at her brother.

ESTELLE: I admit it; but Gordon has tried my patience a great deal lately — and I let my feelings run away with my tongue. Forgive me, daddy.

BERKLEY (*sitting down, taking her into his arms, gently stroking her hair*): Freely; but I'm afraid my little girl is losing her heart rapidly to a certain young man, or she wouldn't have been so quick to resent any aspersions cast upon him. (*With a little sigh as she hides head on his shoulder*) I've always dreaded the moment when this event should arrive, but if you approve of him, Estelle, and believe he is worthy of your confidence, you'll never hear a word of complaint from me. I'd trust in your good judgment far more than in my own, and I have nothing but respect for him as it is, — though I shall always envy him if he is able to take my greatest treasure away from me.

ESTELLE: No man can ever take your place in my heart, daddy.

BERKLEY: I know that, but he's going to crowd me pretty hard. Still, I believe there's room for us both in that loving heart of yours, — tho' he'll probably want the lion share of it, the selfish creature. And come, now, — 'fess up. Do you love him, sweetheart?

ESTELLE: I'm — I'm afraid — I do, daddy.

BERKLEY (*releasing her, rising, speaking brusksly to cover emotions*): And that sends me to bed a-flying. Don't sit up too long and moon over that young scamp who's going to steal you away from me, confound him.

ESTELLE (*running after him as he goes to Left*): Daddy, before you go I want to tell you something. (*Taking his face and drawing it down to her*) Always remember that whatever I may do in the future — however strange my actions may seem — I have the best of motives at heart; will you remember that, daddy?

BERKLEY: What are you driving at, child?

ESTELLE: Nothing I can explain at present. But it is quite possible that all your fears of losing me will prove groundless. I'm going to weigh the man I love in the balance, and if he falls short of my expectations — (*forcing a laugh*) — well, you may have to keep me with you as long as you live — and then you ought to be satisfied. (*Kisses him and gives him a playful push toward door*) Now go to bed — without asking any questions.

BERKLEY (*looking at her with a puzzled expression for a moment*): All right; I will. (*Shaking head dubiously*) Any man that tries to fathom a woman's mind needs to have his sanity investigated. Good night!

(*Exits with wondering expression.*)

*(Estelle smiles until door closes, when she changes to a look of dread; goes to piano; picks up photo.)*

ESTELLE *(speaking to photo)*: Tomorrow night will settle your fate, little girl, — and mine!

*(Sighs, staring at photo fixedly, showing apprehension.)*

CURTAIN.

END OF ACT II.



## ACT III



## ACT III

(The next evening)

*Scene*—PRIVATE DINING ROOM OF ROAD HOUSE IN THE BRONX

Setting represents a cozy dining room of typical road-house style; a table at Center with two chairs facing each other; table is spread with dishes, etc.; a wine-bucket containing ice and bottle of wine on floor near table; doors at Right and Left.

At rise of curtain a WAITER enters at Right with a platter and metal cover, going to table and placing platter on same, lifting cover for an instant to see if "bird" is satisfactory, then giving final touches to table appointments.

Enter REISENSTEIN at Right.

REISENSTEIN (*going to table and examining same, nodding satisfaction, speaking with foreign accent*): Aw! efveryting iss fine, Francois. De couple vill soon be here, and den you make kvick get out. De young man haf leave order not to be disturb'—catch on? (*Digs Waiter in ribs significantly, Waiter nods comprehension and both grin.*) I vill go and see if de bedroom iss O. K.

(*Goes out door Left, Waiter continuing final arrangements.*)

(*Estelle and Paul enter at Right, the latter in dress suit, Inverness, crush hat, etc.; Estelle in theatre gown, with wrap and opera veil which conceals features.*)

(*Waiter bows obsequiously; offers to assist in removing wraps.*)

PAUL (*waving him aside*): Never mind. (*Glances toward table and nods approval.*) You can go. If we need anything else I'll ring for you.

(*Waiter bows and exits at Right.*)

(*Estelle glances around room nervously; is about to raise veil, but drops it with a gasp of dismay when Reisenstein enters at Left.*)

REISENSTEIN: Aw! you vas alretty here. (*Rubbing hands, bowing, speaking servilely*) I hope you vill find efveryting as you haf order'. I haf give 'special 'tention to diss suite. My chef he haf make you one fine —

PAUL (*cutting him short*): We'll find out how good your chef is in due time, Mr. Reisenstein.

REISENSTEIN (*bowing*): Aw! dat iss kvite true. (*Nodding to Left*) De lady she vill find efvery gonvenience in de bedroom —

PAUL (*interrupting coldly, as Estelle gives a shocked start*): The lady does not need any suggestions in that respect, Mr. Reisenstein. Don't let us detain you.

REISENSTEIN: Aw! pardon me. (*Backing to door Right, bowing, with bus of hands*) If you need anything —

PAUL: I can ring for it.

REISENSTEIN: Aw! kvite true.

(*Exits, bowing profusely.*)

ESTELLE (*with increasing nervousness*): Gracious! what a strange man.

(*Raises veil and glances around apprehensively.*)

PAUL: I have never met Mr. Reisenstein before today, but he is rather an "oily" individual, I should judge, and his peculiar business has a tendency to make him so, though it seems to be a natural characteristic of the man.

ESTELLE: What do you mean by — *peculiar* business?

PAUL: Can't you guess — without my entering into details? (*When she shakes her head in perplexity*) Well, he caters to a class of patronage that won't bear too close an investigation — the "nighthawk" element of the city.

ESTELLE (*in dismay*): Then this hotel is —?

PAUL (*bluntly*): A road house on the outskirts of the city — where people of more or less shady reputation find themselves secluded from prying eyes when seeking surreptitious pleasures.

ESTELLE (*staggered*): And you — took me — here? How could you do that, — you whom I believed in and trusted as a man of honor?

PAUL (*wincing*): Why, I supposed you realized where you were going after we left the theatre and travelled all this distance in the taxicab. I offered no explanation during the ride, as you seemed adverse to conversation of any kind.

ESTELLE: And you thought I came willingly to such a place — as this seems to be?

PAUL (*uneasily*): I did.

ESTELLE (*thunderstruck*): In the short while that you have known me, what have I ever done to give you such an impression of me?

PAUL: When you permitted me to kiss and embrace you last night — upon so slight an acquaintance — without being immediately requested to leave your house, I naturally concluded that —

ESTELLE (*bitterly, when he pauses with a nervous gesture*): That I was a light o' love — to be wantonly treated — then thrown aside and forgotten — (*Turning away with a shudder*) — Oh, how I have misjudged you! (*Clenching hands convulsively*) Are there no true men in this world? Are they all beasts and reprobates?

PAUL (*with a touch of remorse*): You are justified in so thinking, for under certain conditions and provocations all men are more or less alike — where women are concerned — be they prince or pauper, minister or layman, lawyer or criminal, laborer or thief — having inherited the pri-

mordial instincts of their savage ancestors, which no sphere of environment, no degree of civilization or culture can totally eradicate. The spirit of the caveman dwells within us all to a certain extent.

ESTELLE: No, no! — I can't believe it — of you! My mind tells me to condemn you, but my heart speaks a different language. (*Pleadingly*) Oh, tell me that you didn't bring me here for an ignoble purpose!

PAUL (*with sudden feeling of revulsion against himself*): I wish I could — now, — but I can't — without stating a deliberate falsehood.

ESTELLE (*shrinking away from him in horror*): Oh!

PAUL (*fiercely*): Yes; you do right to shrink from me! I am an unclean beast — not fit to breathe the same atmosphere with you! In a moment of madness — for a reason I can't explain — I brought you here to ruin your reputation irrevocably! I want you to know this so that you may hate me — loathe me — in the future, as that is all I deserve, although I now realize that I love you with an overpowering passion! (*Seeing her give a convulsive start*) But you need not fear that I shall make the slightest attempt to take advantage of the position into which my madness has thrown you. My only desire now is to see you safely home before your absence shall be discovered. When that is accomplished I shall drop out of your life forever. (*Going to Right*) I'll go down-stairs and order an auto to take you back to the city.

ESTELLE: Wait a moment, please. We needn't hurry, as I have the latchkey, and requested no one to sit up and await my return from the theatre.

PAUL: But why delay?

ESTELLE (*haltingly, sinking into chair near table*): Because I, also, have a confession to make.

PAUL (*amazed*): You!

ESTELLE: Yes. I accompanied you tonight with a definite purpose in view. I can't explain matters — probably for a similar reason to the one you are unable to give as to your object in bringing me here. It is possible, however, that my explanation will become self-evident — if we delay leaving for — perhaps — a half an hour.

PAUL (*staring at her dumfoundedly*): I — I don't know — what to make — of this.—

ESTELLE: Don't try to understand anything — now. Let us await — developments. Please sit down and be calm — as I am endeavoring to be.

PAUL (*snapping hat together and taking chair on other side of table*): It is very warm in here.

ESTELLE: You might remove your Inverness and you'd be more comfortable.

PAUL: I think I will. (*Rises and removes coat.*) Shall I assist you with your wrap?

ESTELLE: No; please don't. I prefer to remain — fully dressed.

PAUL (*sitting down, looking at table*): Shall we — try to eat something?

ESTELLE (*with a glance of aversion at table*): It would choke me to touch anything — in this house. But if you desire to do so —

PAUL: No; you're right. It would be impossible.

ESTELLE: Then, to relieve the tedium of waiting, I shall try to give a partial explanation of my conduct: My motive in permitting you to — embrace me last night without showing due indignation — and my object in coming with you tonight — was not anything for which I need be ashamed, as I believed the purpose I had in view would justify my acts. But now I realize that it was madness

upon my part, as you just admitted for yourself; for I might have known that you — or any man, for that matter — would misconstrue my motive.

PAUL: I confess I am unable to see any laudable motive — either in what I have done or you have permitted me to do — in placing ourselves in this deplorable situation.

ESTELLE: I don't know what *your* motive could have been — (*shuddering*) — and I don't think I *want* to know it; but mine — as I see it now — was a wild desire to aid a girl friend of mine who is very dear to me; and I believed I could trust my honor in your hands without any danger of lasting injury to my reputation.

PAUL: I still fail to comprehend what you mean, but I realize that I have misjudged you badly. (*Rises and begins pacing floor in agitation*) Good God! What a cad I was — to even think of taking advantage of your seeming willingness to —  
(*Stops, unable to continue.*)

ESTELLE: Please calm yourself. If the half hour passes without — without anything taking place — we will leave this house and endeavor to forget tonight's incident entirely.

PAUL: I sincerely hope you will be able to do so, but I know I won't, — for my remorse will gnaw me to my dying day.  
(*Knock heard on door Right; both start.*)  
That must be the proprietor.

ESTELLE (*rising hastily*): Oh, I don't want to see that man again!

PAUL (*indicating door Left*): Then step into the other room and I'll find out what he wants. Lock the door — if you fear — anything; but you can rest assured that no one shall enter to molest you.

(*Estelle hurries out at Left; Paul goes to Right; opens door.*)

(*Enter Reisenstein, followed by Gordon, Paul stepping back in surprise; Gordon gives a hasty glance around room, then a vengeful look at Paul as Reisenstein addresses him.*)

REISENSTEIN: Aw! pardon me, — but this young man he insist' to come in here. If I not let him he say he vill call de police — (*with bus of hands*) — and I haf many guests what not want to see de police in my hotel.

GORDON (*sneeringly*): Very likely. A raid on your joint to-night would result in several divorces cases no doubt.

REISENSTEIN (*nervously*): Aw! you vas wrong, young man. I keep a hotel of respect', and haf nefver make trouble for de police. —

GORDON: But they might make considerable trouble for you — if they wanted to — though I presume you pay them so well that it would be a severe loss to their pockets to close your place up.

REISENSTEIN: Aw! you haf one wrong impress', young man.

GORDON: Don't try to bluff me, Reisenstein. I know your reputation from A to Z. You're the slickest article in your particular line of business in New York City.—

PAUL (*interposing*): This discussion is not at all interesting. If you wish to continue it, kindly seek some other room, as this one belongs to me for the time being.

GORDON (*blusteringly, with a glance toward table*): That is quite evident, but as I came here to see you and my — (*checking himself*)—guess you know whom I mean—I'll wait until this smooth individual leaves us alone.

REISENSTEIN: Aw! I vill haste' to make me — what-you-call — scarce. (*In doorway, apprehensively*) But please,

shentlemens, haf pity of my guests, for dey not like to be disturb'.

*(Bows and exits.)*

PAUL *(with studied politeness, passing Gordon)*: Pardon me.  
*(Steps to door and locks it, putting key in pocket.)*

GORDON: Why do you lock the door?

PAUL *(nonchalantly)*: To prevent our worthy host from re-entering—in the event of the coming interview between us growing more than usually interesting. You are at liberty to begin — with whatever object you had in forcing yourself upon me.

GORDON *(somewhat taken back)*: So you're going to try to carry matters off with a high hand, are you? Where's my sister?

PAUL *(with assumed surprise)*: Your sister! How should I know where she is? I don't happen to be her guardian.

GORDON: Oh, come off. Don't you suppose I know she's here?

PAUL: Indeed!

GORDON: You bet I do. I followed your taxicab in another one all the way from the theatre.

PAUL: You surprise me. I've heard that your character is not any too good, but I didn't suppose you could be sneak enough to spy upon a comparative stranger like myself.

GORDON *(angrily)*: You'll find out what kind of a sneak I am. I don't propose to let you — or any other man from the wild and woolly West — come here to the East and play loose and fast with my sister. I'll show you that we Easterners believe in protecting our womenfolks from fortune-hunters like you, and that their reputation is sacred to us.

PAUL *(biting lips to restrain impulse to laugh in Other's face)*: A very laudable veneration, I must say. I hope you have always been just as careful with the reputation

of all women you have met; for when we upbraid others, we must be able to show clean hands ourselves. (*Staring at him intently*) You, of course, have never wronged any other man's sister, or you would not be so "righteously indignant" regarding the fancied injury you believe I have caused to *your* sister.

GORDON (*wincing, but trying to bluster it out*): We'll leave my personal affairs alone; they don't concern you. (*Working himself into a rage*) I've followed you here to save my sister's reputation. You probably fooled her to this place, and if that blundering idiot downstairs hadn't tried to stop me, I'd have been in this room sooner; and by heavens! if I've arrived too late, and if you've wronged my sister, I'll kill you like a dog.

PAUL (*calmly, but watching him closely*): You don't say! You'd like to add murder to the rest of your crimes, would you?

GORDON: Crimes! Who says I have committed any crimes?

PAUL (*grimly*): I happen to know of *one* crime that you have committed for which the law could not administer a fitting punishment, but for which you deserve death nevertheless.

GORDON: Oh, come off with that kind of rot! I didn't arrive here to bandy words with you. I want my sister. (*Looking toward Left*) I presume she's in there.

PAUL: You can presume whatever you like, but it won't do you any good.

GORDON: We'll see about that.

(*Starts toward Left.*)

(*Paul suddenly steps forward and hurls him back toward Right, Gordon falling to floor.*)

PAUL (*sternly*): You'll kindly keep out of that room.

GORDON (*rising, beside himself with rage*): By thunder! I'll fix you!

(*Pulls out a pistol from back pocket, but before he can make use of weapon Paul is upon him, grasping his wrist; they struggle violently for possession of pistol; Gordon acts like a maniac and is not easily subdued. During struggle the table is overturned and the dishes crash to floor. Paul finally overcomes Gordon; forces him into a chair and compels him to relinquish hold of pistol, when he steps back and waits for Gordon to recover his breath, as the unusual exertion causes him to pant heavily.*)

PAUL (*quietly*): I think this little toy is safer in my hands than yours.

(*Estelle opens door at Left, stealthily and looks in with an expression of fright; but seeing Paul master of the situation, she withdraws her head and softly closes door, her actions being unnoticed by the two men.*)

GORDON (*recovering and ruefully examining his wrist*): You nearly — broke — my arm.

PAUL: Sorry; but you put up a better argument than one would believe you capable of — from the life of dissipation you have been leading.

GORDON (*giving him a puzzled stare*): What do you know about my life?

PAUL: A great deal more than I wish were true.

(*Knock heard on door Right.*)

Our little fracas has evidently attracted some attention.

REISENSTEIN (*outside at Right*): Aw! pardon me, shentlemens, but you haf my guests disturb' —

PAUL (*raising voice, speaking to Right*): Only a slight accident; so have no alarm. Quiet your guests and all damage will be paid for.

REISENSTEIN: Aw! pardon me. I vill to my guests say dat you are shentlemens, and —

*(His voice trails off into a meaningless rumble as he walks away from door.)*

PAUL: What a beautiful specimen of humanity Mr. Reisenstein is — so considerate for the welfare of his guests — at so much per consideration. We should be very proud at having him for our host and being permitted to breathe this refined atmosphere.

GORDON *(truculently)*: And yet you brought my sister to such a place.

PAUL *(after a moment's pause)*: I did; I might as well admit it, for the farce is now finished — *(bitterly)* — and I have lost out on all sides. . . . No, not quite; I still have left the life you wanted to take away from me — though of what use it will be to me hereafter — with a dishonored sister — and a hopeless love — is more than I can see.

GORDON *(wonderingly)*: A dishonored sister?

PAUL *(fiercely, making an unconscious gesture with hand holding pistol)*: Yes; for I am Paul Kirke, — brother to Myra Kirke, — whom you betrayed!

GORDON: You — Paul — Kirke! *(Sinks down in abject fear, holding up a trembling hand and eyeing pistol with dread.)*  
Don't shoot — me! —

PAUL *(showing contempt for his display of cowardice)*: Have no fear of that — although you deserve death, as I told you a moment ago when you didn't realize what I really meant. *(Puts pistol in pocket to Gordon's great relief.)* I promised my sister Myra that I wouldn't take your life. She, poor girl, pleaded with me to spare you — even when she must have known in her heart that you never intended to keep the promise you made to her this summer. You city dwellers often sneer at the people of the

backwoods, but I learned one thing while travelling the mountain trails with my father as a youngster, and that was — always consider a promise once given to be inviolate, that being a sacred creed of my ancestors.

GORDON (*gaining courage when he hears his life is safe*): But why did you bring my sister to this disreputable house?

PAUL: Having promised to spare your life, unknown to my people I cast about for some way to wreck vengeance upon your family. I managed to obtain recommendations which secured me employment in your father's office, under the assumed name of Weston, with the intention of undermining his business; but last night at your house I decided to retaliate upon your sister for my sister's dishonor. I deliberately brought her here to blast her reputation forever.

GORDON (*sneeringly*): Was that following out another "sacred creed" of your ancestors — to make war upon women?

PAUL (*unheeding sneer*): No; it was the act of a madman; but, thank heavens, I woke up before it became too late. Your sister is as spotless at this moment as she was before she met me — (*abruptly*) — and if you take her back to the city immediately, no one will ever know that she came here with me.

GORDON (*producing a letter*): Don't delude yourself. I received this anonymous typewritten communication late this afternoon, signed "A Well-wisher," giving me the hint to keep my eye on her tonight. So you see others beside ourselves know what is going on.

(*Hands letter to Paul.*)

PAUL (*staring at Gordon in shocked amazement after reading letter*): Good Lord! How could anyone have learned what my intentions were?

GORDON: Search me; but the letter speaks for itself. You've blasted my sister's reputation all right. It won't be long before the whole city will know that she visited Reisenstein's notorious resort in the company of one of her father's employees. What a choice morsel that will make for society scandal-mongers to chew upon.

PAUL (*pacing floor remorsefully*): No doubt. Like carrion-seeking animals they'll pounce upon her character and tear it to shreds with their evil tongues — in spite of her innocence!

GORDON (*with regretful tone*): That's a certainty. I admit I haven't been of much credit to my people, but that my sister should be placed in a position where the finger of scorn can be pointed at her cuts me to the core.

PAUL (*stopping for an instant, giving Gordon a look of interest*): That shows you have *some* streak of decency in your make-up.

(*Continues pacing as before.*)

GORDON: I've always respected my sister — even if she's been rather hard on me at times, and we've nagged each other a good deal; but she's often helped me out of my troubles when father shut down on me. (*Musing sadly*) Poor sister Stel; you're certainly up against it — now.

PAUL: And it's all my fault! . . . Oh, if I could only undo tonight's mad act in some way! (*Continues pacing floor for a few moments, but stops abruptly; pulls out pistol and hands it to Gordon, speaking in a low, tense tone*) I know your sister can never forgive me, but her reputation is now dearer to me than life; so you'll have to shoot me and say you did it to save her honor because I fooled her to this place. In that way — and that way only — can I atone for my vengeful madness.

GORDON (*aghast*): Good heavens, man! I can't shoot you down in cold blood!

PAUL (*with a warning glance toward Left*): Hush! You wanted to shoot me a while ago —

GORDON: Then I was wild because you knocked me down — and I didn't know — that you were Myra's brother. You may consider me an out and out scoundrel — and probably I have been — as far as your sister is concerned; but I could never kill her brother. You're asking too much of me — and I'm sure my sister would never —

PAUL (*interrupting, bending toward him tauntingly in an effort to make him use pistol*): Oh, you contemptible coward! You haven't the nerve of a polecat! You won't even try to save your sister's good name! Shoot, you cur, and show that you have a grain of manhood in your miserable carcass!

GORDON (*wincing at other's denunciation raises pistol as if to shoot, but lowers it again, trembling violently*): Oh, I can't do it — I can't!

PAUL: Then I'll save you the trouble and do it myself — that will force you to make the defense I've indicated. (*Takes pistol from Gordon's nerveless fingers, but is prevented from using it, as Estelle throws open door Left with a wild scream and rushes across stage, grasping Paul's arm hysterically.*)

ESTELLE: Are you going stark, raving mad? Do you think my reputation will be benefitted by having you commit suicide in the evil house to which you have taken me? I have heard all in the adjoining room, but I had no fear that Gordon would carry out your wild desire. I know his nature too well for that. (*Wresting pistol from his hand*) But when you seemed bent upon making a bad matter worse — I feared your reason had left you en-

tirely. What manner of man are you — who can coldly plan to ruin my name in revenge for your sister's wrongs at my brother's hands — and then Quixotically attempt to atone for the ignoble intention by taking your own life — leaving me to face a world of scorn because of that very act?

PAUL (*who has listened to her with bent head, while Gordon stares at his sister dumbly*): I realize now how foolhardy it would have been — unless you were safely away from here. (*To Gordon*) Please take your sister home immediately.

(*Gordon rises unsteadily to obey request.*)

ESTELLE: Sit down, Gordon. I'm not ready to leave yet.

GORDON: But — don't you think — it would be best — if we —?

ESTELLE: Sit down, please. Before we leave this house I have an explanation to make; it is absolutely necessary in order to prevent Mr.— Kirke from doing anything foolish *after* we have left, as his statement just now intimated that he would.

PAUL (*with a forced smile to disarm her suspicions, as Gordon sinks back in chair*): Oh, nonsense! I have no intention of — of —

ESTELLE: Please don't attempt evasions. You can't blind me any more. I know and understand you thoroughly now. Your code is a strange one,— and diametrically opposed to that of my brother's,— but it is a *man's* code to a certain extent, although rather wild and unreasoning in its workings; and when you hear my explanation I hope your normal condition will return to you. (*Turning to her brother*) Gordon, I wrote the decoy letter that you received by messenger this afternoon — I wrote it down in father's office this morning.

*(Others show surprise.)*

GORDON: You!

ESTELLE: Yes — I.

GORDON: Why?

ESTELLE: Because I wanted you to follow me tonight, as I knew you would. I accompanied Mr. — Kirke deliberately, though I didn't know that was his right name.

GORDON: But what — was — your object?

ESTELLE: I hoped — by placing myself in jeopardy — to arouse some manhood in you to do right by Myra Kirke. *(Bending head)* I reasoned rather wildly that if you saw your own sister in a position where her reputation might be at stake, you would awake to a full realization of the wrong you had done to Myra in not keeping your promise to her. I believed I could safely trust myself in Mr. Kirke's hands without sustaining any lasting injury to my reputation,— and so far my trust in him has not proved false,— although I little dreamed that I came here with Myra's own brother in trying to aid that poor child in her sore trouble. —

*(Gordon and Paul are staggered by her revelation.)*

PAUL: Good God! what a noble motive — when compared to mine in bringing you here!

ESTELLE: I take little credit for my actions — now — in the sane light of reason.

*(Knock heard on door Right; All Three start.)*

REISENSTEIN *(outside)*: Aw! pardon me, but you haf my guests disturb' once again yet. I vill haf to ask you to leave my hotel right away. Please open de door.

ESTELLE *(lowering veil hastily, turning back toward Right)*: He must have heard my scream, but don't let him in here.

PAUL *(going to Right)*: I'll attend to him. Remain perfectly calm until I return.

*(Produces key and opens door.)*

REISENSTEIN *(in doorway, about to enter)*: Aw! I tank you —

PAUL: I'll see you outside.

*(Pushes him out and exits, closing door, their voices trailing off with ad lib. words as they walk away.)*

ESTELLE *(raising veil)*: Gordon, I'm wondering if your shallow mind can grasp the caliber of the man who has just left the room. I cannot find it in my heart to censure him too greatly for wishing to avenge his sister's dishonor,—though I shudder to think what might have happened to me if the better part of his nature hadn't come to the surface almost the instant we entered this room — and saved me from a struggle that would have meant life or death, to me. But despite his original intentions toward me, I can't help respecting the man after all; for he proved his real worth when he was willing to lay down his life in the mistaken idea that my reputation would be saved thereby. He didn't stop to reason matters out; his only desire was to atone for the wrong he believed he had done to me; and if he was willing to do that for your sister,—whom he hasn't really injured at all,—can't you at least try to atone for your contemptible treatment of his sister?

GORDON *(still too dazed to arouse himself, speaking mechanically)*: I — don't know — what to — say — or — think.

*(Stares at floor in stony attitude.)*

ESTELLE *(mistaking his attitude for apathy, turns from him with a vehement gesture)*: No; it's useless to appeal to you. That man's noble spirit of self-sacrifice — not to mention your sister's effort to arouse you to do justice — is lost upon your dissipated and drink-weakened senses. You haven't the manhood of a crawling worm!

*(Gordon straightens up and is about to speak, when Paul enters at Right.)*

PAUL: I have arranged all matters with Reisenstein. You can both leave now without anyone being the wiser. The hall is empty, and will remain so until you are gone. *(To Gordon)* I sent my taxicab away when we arrived; *(Estelle shudders)*. I hope you have retained yours.

GORDON: Yes; it is out at the curb.

PAUL *(relieved)*: Good. Please go and tell the chauffeur to bring it around to the side entrance; then come back and get your sister — and don't delay a moment longer than necessary.

*(Gordon nods assent and exits at Right.)*

*(Paul turns toward Right without giving Estelle a look; constrained pause between them.)*

ESTELLE *(breaking pause haltingly, looking at pistol in her hand)*: Mr. Kirke.

*(He gives a slight start, but remains turned toward Right.)*

Please turn around. *(Forcing an effort to speak lightly)* It is very hard to address your back — not to mention the rudeness —

PAUL *(swinging around abruptly)*: I beg your pardon.

ESTELLE *(earnestly)*: Before my brother returns I want you to make me a promise; will you?

PAUL: What promise could you want — of me?

ESTELLE: I'm going to leave this weapon with you, but I want you to promise me that you will not use it for an ignoble purpose — or in any other way take a coward's refuge — after I am gone.

PAUL *(flustered)*: What an odd request.

ESTELLE: Perhaps it is, but I want that promise from you before I leave.

PAUL *(evasively)*: There's no necessity for your demanding that.

ESTELLE: Maybe not; still, in your present overwrought state you might be tempted to do something unmanly — from a false notion of trying to wipe out tonight's happenings. Under normal conditions I would not feel alarmed, but now I want your promise, for I know you'd consider it sacred.

PAUL (*making an impotent gesture*): What possible interest can it be to you what becomes of me hereafter? When you leave this room I pass out of your existence forever — that is self-evident — considering what I deliberately planned to do to injure you. There are some things that no true woman can ever forgive or condone,— nor could a man with a spark of common decency expect it,— and I know that I have placed myself beyond the pale of humanity by tonight's work.

ESTELLE: To end all argument, I'll agree to anything you may say in condemnation of yourself; but I still want that promise.

PAUL: Why?

ESTELLE: Because I should never have a minute's peace of mind if, by my coming here with you of my own accord, I robbed the world of a man of your skill and genius — in a moment of temporary madness.

PAUL: Is that — your only reason?

ESTELLE: That is the only reason I care to discuss — in a house of this sort. Do I get your promise?

PAUL (*moodily, after a pause*): No; I refuse to tie myself down to any more promises — such as my sister compelled me to give three months ago.

(*Estelle clenches hands with a look of dread, as Gordon enters at Right, leaving door open.*)

GORDON: All ready, Stel, and not a soul in the hallway.

ESTELLE (*looking anxiously at Paul, who stares moodily at floor to avoid meeting her gaze*): I don't know just what to do.—

PAUL: Please don't delay. Leave this miserable house immediately — before you run into anyone — that is all I ask you to do.

GORDON (*when Estelle hesitates*): He is right, Stel. The quicker you get away from here the better.

PAUL: Yes, yes;— go — at once,— please.

ESTELLE (*with sudden determination*): Very well; I shall do so. (*Stepping near and putting pistol in his hand, he taking it mechanically*) When I accompanied you here I trusted blindly in your honor — and I'm going to do the same now — even though you refuse to give me the promise I requested. (*Stepping backward toward Right*) It remains to be seen whether my trust in you has been misplaced — whether you will prove yourself a *man* under the final test. (*Trying to repress emotions*) If I am judging you wrongly now,— then — good-bye,— Paul — (*He starts, but does not look up.*)

and may God forgive me for leaving you to fight it out — alone!

(*Drops veil and hurries out, Gordon following her after giving Paul a look of doubt.*)

(*Paul raises head slowly and stares at doorway; becomes conscious of pistol in his hand; looks at it dazedly for an instant, but suddenly throws it away with a repugnant gesture; sinks down in a chair, burying his face in his hands with a heavy sob.*)

CURTAIN.

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV



## ACT IV

(The following morning)

*Scene — Private Office of the Berkley Construction Co.*

Room neatly furnished for business purposes, with a large flat desk having blue-prints, letters, documents, etc., scattered over same; an extension phone attached to desk; a door at Center up stage; other doors at Right and Left.

At rise of CURTAIN, BERKLEY is discovered seated at desk consulting a sheet of paper, as he gives final words of dictation to STENOGRAPHER near desk.

BERKLEY (*dictating, Stenographer writing upon pad*):— And

I shall send my best engineer, Mr. Paul Weston, to examine your plant within a few days, and whatever decision he makes will be perfectly satisfactory to me. Yours truly. (*Laying down sheet*) That's all at present.

(*Stenographer rises and goes to Center.*)

If Mr. Weston has arrived ask him to please step in here, as I wish to consult with him regarding the Fernly proposition.

(*Stenographer bows and exits, Berkley picking up sheet again, studying it for an instant, then pulls out watch with knitted brow, glancing toward Center.*)

(*Enter Paul at Center; looks pale and worn.*)

PAUL (*soberly*): Good morning, Mr. Berkley.

BERKLEY (*smiling genially*): Good morning, Paul. What was it — a blockade that held you up? It's the first time since you entered my employ that you've been late — (*Noticing his appearance*) — Why, what's the matter? You look all fagged out, boy?

PAUL: I — I didn't rest very well last night.

BERKLEY (*laughingly*): Too much theatre — eh? Poor show, I suppose, and you needed a longer time to recover from the effect. Estelle didn't come down and take breakfast with me as she generally does, and I was unable to find out whether she enjoyed herself or not. But if she doesn't look any better than you do this morning, my sister will probably phone me to send for a specialist immediately, and I'll have to put an embargo on any more theatre-going.

PAUL (*nervously*): Mr. Berkley, I — (*Stops as telephone bell is heard.*)

BERKLEY: What did I tell you? Bet that's my sister now. (*Bus of phone.*)

Hello! (*Listens, then smiles.*) Yes; this is daddy. How are you feeling this morning, you lazy girl? . . . Glad to hear it. I was afraid it was your aunt calling me up to hurry a specialist to the house and look you over. . . . Oh, yes; he's here in my office now — but why the anxiety in your voice? (*Roguishly, glancing sideways at Paul*) He looks a little the worse for the wear, but I think he's still in the ring — ready for business — despite the fact that you made him keep such late hours last night that he came strolling into the office an hour behind time — and say, I'm not going to dock *his* pay; I'll take it out of your allowance, as I consider you the cause. . . . What's that? . . . (*Laughing*) Of course he hears what I'm saying to you. . . . No; he hasn't said a word about anything. The play you saw was probably so wretched that he considers it beneath criticism. . . . What? . . . Oh, I see. . . . All right, girlie; I won't. . . . Oh, we'll be so busy he'll have no time to think. . . . You'd better ring off in that case, or I might. . . . Of course I can keep a secret; I belong to the male

gender. . . . (*Sobering up*) Why, no. Gordon must be still in bed. . . . You don't say! — already up and left the house? . . . Very well; I'll curb my curiosity until . . . . All right. . . . Bye-by, sweetheart. (*Hangs up receiver, smiling grimly*) I've just heard wonderful news, Paul, — that my son has managed to pull himself out of bed before the noon hour. (*Picks up sheet and blue-print from desk*) If you'll draw up a chair we'll go over that Fernly proposition again.

PAUL (*who has had varied bus to suit situation*): Mr. Berkley, — I — I'm afraid I shall have to disappoint you. I wish to tender my resignation — to take effect immediately.

BERKLEY (*thunderstruck*): What! Your resignation! Good Lord, man, you can't mean that!

PAUL: I do. I have arranged to take the next through train for the West; in fact, I have already purchased my ticket.

BERKLEY: But what's the reason for this sudden move on your part? If it's a question of salary —

PAUL: It isn't. If you offered me a million dollars a year, Mr. Berkley, I couldn't remain in your employ another minute.

BERKLEY (*with a touch of sternness*): Such a statement demands an explanation, young man, and I believe I'm entitled to it.

PAUL: You are, — but I can't give you a *full* explanation. I will say this, however, that I entered your employ under a subterfuge — for an ignoble purpose — and the only way I can wipe it out — if I wish to live — is to put thousands of miles between myself and this city.

(*Turns away with a nervous gesture.*)

BERKLEY (*after a puzzled pause*): Did you and Estelle have a quarrel last night, — and is this sudden resolution of

yours the result? (*Smiling covertly*) If that's the case, perhaps you'll change your mind when you see my daughter again.

PAUL: I was unworthy of ever meeting your daughter in the first place, Mr. Berkley, and I never expect to see her again. She is so far above me in every respect — I don't mean socially or financially — that it would be a desecration to her good name to associate upon the slightest degree of familiarity with a man of my stamp.

BERKLEY: I don't understand this, Paul; it goes beyond my comprehension entirely; for over the phone just now Estelle seemed quite anxious about you, — not so much in what she said, but the tone of voice she used.

PAUL: I know what caused her anxiety, and you'll probably learn it when you see her; but she need have no alarm. I have conquered all inclination to — to do anything foolish — at least, while in this city.

BERKLEY (*staring at him searchingly*): So? It's as bad as all that? What in the world could have taken place last night to unman you this way? It isn't like Estelle to hurt anybody's feelings to the extent —

PAUL: Don't think that, Mr. Berkley. I'm the only one to blame in this case.

BERKLEY: In what way?

PAUL: That I can't explain.

BERKLEY: Then I shall certainly ask Estelle to elucidate matters when she — (*checking himself*) — when I see her.

PAUL: And whatever she wishes to tell you, you may be sure it will be nothing but the truth — however black I may then appear in your eyes — and you'll probably be very glad that I left your employ.

BERKLEY: That remains to be seen. (*Picking up sheet and blue-print again.*) Now, about this Fernly proposition —

PAUL: Pardon me, but I have resigned my position as civil engineer in this office, and —

BERKLEY: But I haven't accepted your resignation yet, if you please. (*As Paul makes an impatient gesture.*) Look here, Paul. I believe I merit a little more consideration from you than to have you walk out of my office in this manner without a moment's warning, and without offering a word of explanation that any sane man could swallow. Man to man — not as employer to employee — do you think you're giving me a square deal?

PAUL (*uneasily*): Perhaps not; but after you've talked with your daughter you'll no doubt agree that I took the best and quickest way out of a situation that has become impossible for me to sustain a minute longer than necessary. Don't you realize that this is a serious matter to me, Mr. Berkley?

BERKLEY: I'll answer that question — after I have seen my daughter.

PAUL: But that won't be until evening, and I want to be many miles away from here by that time.

BERKLEY (*smiling mysteriously*): What are you afraid of — that I'll go gunning for you after I've talked with Estelle?

PAUL (*with a wan smile*): That fear doesn't bother me (*sobberly*); in fact, I'd rather welcome such a move on your part—if your daughter's good name wouldn't suffer thereby.

BERKLEY: Heavens, man, you're in a morbid frame of mind; but you needn't think that I'm going to jump to any wild conclusions. I know my daughter; I've just talked with her over the phone; and if there were any reasons for "gunning operations" she would never have called me up and talked the way she did — about you.

PAUL: Your daughter is an angel, Mr. Berkley, and her charitable nature might cause her to overlook many things that a less broad-minded woman would resent as an insult.

BERKLEY: I told you the other night that she was the greatest treasure I possess, and when I introduced her to you — a comparative stranger — I demonstrated the confidence I had in you as a man; and although you now seem to be trying to incriminate yourself — for some wild reason or other — I still believe that my trust in you has not been misplaced.

PAUL: But I proved false to the trust you reposed in me.—

BERKLEY: I'll accept that as a fact when my daughter tells me so, not before. (*With bus of blue-print*) In the meantime, we'll drop the subject and get down to the Fernly proposition.

PAUL: I'm sorry to appear rude, but I can discuss no business matters. I intend to leave this office immediately — whether you object or not. I want to thank you for the kindness you have shown toward me; and while I may be repaying it rather harshly, I believe I am actuated by the best of motives in removing myself from you and your family as quickly as I can. Good-bye, Mr. Berkley.

(*Starts toward Center.*)

BERKLEY (*trying to gain time*) One moment, Paul. Yesterday you made some very valuable suggestions regarding this Fernly matter, but you didn't put them down in black and white. Couldn't you at least take a few minutes to do that for me — before you go? (*Indicating door Right*) You might step into the drafting room; there's no one in there now to disturb you.

PAUL (*coming back to desk*): I'll be glad to do that, Mr. Berkley. It won't take me long.

(Accepts blue-print and sheet of paper and starts toward Right, Berkley secretly pleased at success of ruse to detain him.)

(Enter Abner at Center in semi-backwoods costume; shows stern, forbidding demeanor as he walks in, but changes to look of surprise upon seeing Paul, who is equally surprised to see his father.)

BERKLEY: Why, hello, Mr. Kirke! What brought you to New York?

ABNER (coldly, without looking at Berkley): I'll tell you in a minute, Mr. Berkley. (Sternly to Paul) What 're you doin' in this office? You look as if you belonged here — with those papers in your hand.

PAUL (nervously, as he dimly realizes why his father has come to New York): Yes; I've been working here for two months, but I'm getting through today to start for the West in a few hours.

ABNER: Been workin' here for two months an' never said anythin' about it in your letters? Is that treatin' us folks right, at home?

(Berkley shows amazement.)

PAUL: If you'll come with me I'll explain everything to your entire satisfaction.

ABNER: You'll have to do some tall explainin'; but that'll keep for a bit — while I 'tend to the thing that brought me here. (Turns to Berkley with a grim expression) Now I'll answer your question, Mr. Berkley, an' it won't take me long.

BERKLEY: My time is entirely at your disposal, Mr. Kirke. (With a glance at Paul) but I don't quite understand —

ABNER: Reckon you'll understand when I'm through talkin'.

Two days ago I found my little girl, Myra, a-cryin' her eyes out in her mother's arms, an' it didn't take me long

to find out why she was a-cryin' — an' then I mos' went crazy. (*With breaking voice*) Guess I talked kinder sharp to my little girl — an' that night she disappeared — an' I ain't seen her since — an' I don't know if she's livin' or dead.

(*Paul clenches hands convulsively.*)

I scoured the woods for her all night 'long, but she'd covered her tracks so well I couldn't find the least sign of her. Yesterday I gave up lookin' for her an' headed for Noo York— (*fiercely*)—to camp on the trail o' your son until I land him in hell where he belongs!

BERKLEY: My son!

ABNER: Yes; the son you wanted to leave with me this summer,— an' I wish now I'd let you; I could 'a' reached him quicker then. You may wonder why I've come to tell you this — 'stead o' goin' after him first,— but I've always tried to play square with ev'rybody, an' I wanted to give you fair warnin' that when I lay my hands on your son there won't be much left o' him for you to bury; an' I also want you to know that I curse the day I ever rented my camp to you!

BERKLEY (*dazed*): This seems impossible for me to believe.—

ABNER: But you've *got* to believe it, for I don't practice tellin' lies; an' I forced the truth out o' my little girl when she begged me on her knees not to do it — (*remorsefully*) — an' I guess that's the reason she left home — prob'ly never to come back.

PAUL: Don't think that, father.

(*Berkley is surprised.*)

She probably took the back trail to Mark Henly's place — to hide until you calmed down.

ABNER: If she did we'll never see her again. She couldn't make it in the dark.

PAUL: *She* could — where you and I might fail; and I believe she'll return all right.—

ABNER: Your b'lievin' it won't bring her back. (*Sharply*) I found out that you knew this afore you left home, an' now you tell me you've been workin' here for two months an' in all that time you haven't tried to kill that snake! Guess your college education must 'a' weakened your nerve.

PAUL (*wincing*): Killing people in cold blood may have been backwoods' methods of trying to "square" things like this, but in civilized communities it would hardly do; — and, besides, I promised Myra I wouldn't —

ABNER: I don't care what you promised Myra. Your ancestors always took the law into their own hands — when their womenfolks 'd been wronged — an' if your blood hadn't turned to water by too much education, you'd 'a' stamped out that skunk's life long afore this.

(*Paul realizes the uselessness of trying to argue matters with his father; turns to Berkley, who shows apprehension when he learns Paul's identity, and that he must have entered his employ for an ulterior purpose.*)

PAUL (*laying down blue-print and sheet*): Mr. Berkley, my father's arrival partially explains what I couldn't tell you a moment ago; but you needn't be alarmed that I have accomplished any lasting injury to any member of your family, although I admit I entered your employ for that purpose originally, with a wild plan to avenge my sister's betrayal — some way.

(*Abner shows surprise.*)

BERKLEY (*relieved*): I'm glad to hear you speak so frankly, Paul, for I still want to retain my faith in you — in spite of the forbidding situation we now find ourselves in. (*To Abner, sadly*) Mr. Kirke, I can't express in words what

this revelation means to me. If the mere outpouring of money could atone for my son's guilt, I'd willingly sacrifice all I'm worth. But money — however powerful it may be in a commercial and, perhaps, social sense — can never rectify a wrong of this kind.

ABNER (*in a somewhat mollified tone*): You're right, Mr. Berkley. As far as I can see there's only one way to clean camp — to burn up the rubbish.

BERKLEY (*thoughtfully*): But I'm just wondering if we'd be any better off if you took my son's life. Harsh as it may sound, I have no desire to plead with you to spare him. Place me in your position today, and I'd probably feel and act just as you do; and my sympathy is entirely with you and your family. I have no doubt that a jury would acquit you eventually — when the particulars were laid before it; but you'd have to go through an ignominious trial, with your daughter's name dragged through the courts, and your wife suffering indescribable agony of mind in the meantime; and would my son's life be worth all that? Would it restore Myra to life — if, as you seem to fear, she is dead — or, if living, would it better her situation?

(*Both Abner and Paul stare at Berkley in amazement at his quiet but logical reasoning.*)

ABNER (*breaking pause*): By thunder! you're right again — though I couldn't see it that way when I headed for New York yesterday, blind as a bat in daytime, an' seein' nothin' but red afore my eyes. (*With a wan smile*) You're a wonder at argument, Mr. Berkley, as I found out last summer up at the camp. Guess the best thing I can do is to go back home an' take up the search for Myra — if she's livin'.

PAUL: I'm with you, father; and we'll go over every foot of the back trail — if we don't find her at Mark Henly's.

BERKLEY (*to gain time as before*): I have a suggestion to make. Postpone leaving my office until I can send for my son to come down here and meet you, Mr. Kirke, — without his knowing that you are here.

ABNER: I don't think that'd be safe, Mr. Berkley. I'd prob'ly see red again. —

BERKLEY (*soberly*): I'll chance that. I have an idea that it might wake Gordon up from his lethargy, if he were brought face to face with the consequences of his mode of living. Paul, suppose you take your father into the drafting room and talk things over by yourselves while I see if I can locate Gordon.

(*Paul nods assent; beckons to Abner to follow him, and both exit at Right. Berkley sighs when alone, then pulls phone toward him.*)

(*Enter Estelle at Left.*)

ESTELLE (*with suppressed agitation*): I'm here, daddy.

BERKLEY: And I'm glad you arrived in time. I had a hard time holding him in the office as you requested over the phone. His father is also —

ESTELLE: You needn't tell me anything, daddy. As I arrived in the auto I saw Mr. Kirke entering the building, and I came up the back way to avoid running in to him. I've heard all that's been said since Mr. Kirke came into the office. For the second time in twelve hours I've been guilty of eavesdropping, but I think the end justified the means in both cases — I'll explain the other one to you later. Poor daddy; this is terrible news for you to hear.

BERKLEY (*nodding head sadly*): Have you any idea where Gordon might be found?

ESTELLE: No. He received some message this morning

shortly after you'd left the house, and he dressed hurriedly and went out, telling aunty he wouldn't be back until evening.

BERKLEY: No use trying to locate him in that case. (*Indicating door Right*) But what are we going to do about that poor man in the other room? And what about Paul? I know you have something to tell me about last night —

ESTELLE: Yes; but that can wait until later. While in the back room the thought struck me that I'd like to talk to Mr. Kirke, senior, for a few minutes.

BERKLEY: And you want me to —?

ESTELLE: Go downstairs the back way and take a half-hour's walk — it will do you good and relieve your mind to a certain extent. Will you do that, daddy?

BERKLEY: Of course I will, — if you think it best, — though it seems a little cowardly to leave you to face the situation alone. —

ESTELLE: Not at all. What you've just learned I knew three days ago. I kept it from you, fearing the shock might injure your health; but you are bearing up under the blow wonderfully well, thank heavens. Now go — without a single question. I'll explain everything to you in due time.

BERKLEY: I'll obey you blindly, my dear child, — in the hope that it is all for the best.

(*Caresses her tenderly and goes out at Left; Estelle sinks into chair to gather strength for interview with Abner.*)

(*Knock heard on door Center.*)

ESTELLE: Come in.

(*Enter Myra timidly at Center in modified country costume which shows ravages of her trip over the back trail;*

*has anxious expression, but changes to surprise upon seeing Estelle.)*

MYRA: Estelle! — you here!

ESTELLE (*rising hastily, coming toward her with outstretched arms*): Myra! Thank God that you are alive! (*Takes her into her arms, Myra breaking into sobs.*) There, there! Take courage, little girl. I know all about your troubles.

MYRA: I — know — you do.

ESTELLE (*surprised*): How could you — unless. . . Ah! I understand! You sent the message Gordon received this morning, — and he must have met you.—

MYRA (*nodding assent*): The night before last I went over the back trail and caught a train for New York. —

ESTELLE (*amazed*): You walked those fearful twelve miles in the dark — over a trail that even a man wouldn't try to make unless he had daylight to aid him?

MYRA: I simply had to do it, Estelle, to warn Gordon that my father would probably seek his life; and I couldn't bear to think of the disgrace it would mean to your family — if father arrived in the city before I did.

ESTELLE: Oh, you brave, wonderful little woman! Why, you might have been killed! And yet they call our sex the weaker one!

MYRA (*quietly*): The thought of death didn't bother me, and you see I made it all right. I knew father would never dream that I went that way, or he'd have followed me. But I didn't arrive here until late last night, so I had to wait until this morning to send word to Gordon.

ESTELLE: Myra, before your noble, self-sacrificing spirit my own little effort in your behalf becomes insignificant.

MYRA: No, indeed. Gordon has told me what happened last night — (*shuddering*) — and I don't think I ever want to see my brother again.

ESTELLE: Don't censure your brother too greatly, Myra. He has the hot blood of his male ancestors in his veins, and whatever he was tempted to do to avenge your wrongs was simply the outcome of his strong love for you. But when the supreme test came he proved himself a man,— and I was equally to blame — for throwing temptation his way.

MYRA: But you did that for my sake and I can never forget it, Estelle. —

ESTELLE: We won't talk about that. Where is Gordon now?

MYRA: Waiting for me — downstairs.

ESTELLE: He is?

MYRA (*nodding head bashfully*): He has asked me to marry him, but I refused — unless your father gave his consent.

ESTELLE: There'll be no trouble in obtaining that, I assure you. And thank heavens that my brother has finally woke up!

MYRA: He told me that he was too stunned last night to say anything to you — when you left — that awful place, but this morning he was a changed man, and he admitted to me that you were the cause.—

ESTELLE: Then I have no regrets for what I did last night — however unmaidenly my plans might seem to others. But why does he remain downstairs — instead of coming up here with you?

MYRA: He intended to; but when we reached the building he dreaded meeting his father, and I suggested my going up ahead and — and sort of pave the way before he appeared.

ESTELLE: You brave little soul! Where his courage failed him, you were ready to step into the breach and face my father alone — on a mission from which any woman would naturally shrink. If he has the making of any

kind of a man in him, you will certainly bring it to the surface.

MYRA: I shall do the best I can for Gordon — (*bowing head*) — though I feel unworthy — of being a member of your family.

ESTELLE (*embracing her*): Far from it, Myra. You'll be a credit to us, for I know that your heart is as true today as it was when I first met you, — no matter what mistake your child-like innocence caused you to make. You'll always be dearer to me than any sister could ever have been.

MYRA: But I don't see how you can overlook —

ESTELLE: I have nothing to overlook. We women are frail creatures after all. Under certain conditions the best of us are apt to fall — if the right man catches us unawares. Eternal vigilance upon our part is the only safeguard. But how many of us are there who can reason calmly when love steals our senses away and blinds our vision?

MYRA: How can you say that — when you told me at the camp you didn't know what love was?

ESTELLE: I didn't — then. But that I am able today to hold my head up without a blush of shame upon my cheeks is not due to any special effort of my own will-power, but because I chanced to meet a man who respected and shielded me — when I practically threw myself into his arms. With you it is an entirely different matter, and all blame rests upon my brother's shoulders; for his code of morals precluded any showing of the finer sensibilities of true manhood.—

MYRA: But I believe he intends to reform, Estelle.

ESTELLE: I sincerely hope so — for your sake more than for his own. (*Looking toward Right*) Be calm now, Myra, for

I'm going to tell you that your father is here — in the other room.

MYRA (*alarmed*): My father — already here! . . . Oh, I must warn Gordon! —

ESTELLE (*detaining her*): I don't think that'll be necessary.

MYRA: You don't know my father — when his anger is aroused.

ESTELLE: I know him to be a true, nature's nobleman, and I have no fear regarding Gordon's safety — especially when your father learns what my brother is now willing to do.

MYRA: But father told me the night before last —

ESTELLE: I can imagine what he said, but since then he has seen my father — and I believe he has lost the wild desire to take human life ruthlessly.

MYRA: I wish I could believe that.

*(Enter Abner at Right; Paul comes as far as the doorway after him; but seeing Estelle, steps back quickly, closing door. Estelle notices Paul's action, but decides to make no comment upon the incident. Abner is thunderstruck to see Myra, who seems a little timid about meeting him.)*

ABNER: Myra! 'Re my old eyes playin' tricks with me, or is it really you?

*(Steps over and folds her in his arms, she nestling contentedly in his embrace when she realizes his savage mood has left him.)*

ESTELLE (*smilingly*): Haven't you any greeting for me, Mr. Kirke, — my second-father-of-the-wilds?

ABNER (*releasing Myra*): I beg your pardon, Miss Estelle, but seein' Myra — after I thought I'd lost her forever — kinder threw me off my balance a bit, an' you'll have to overlook my slightin' you.

*(Offers hand.)*

ESTELLE (*taking hand cordially*): I'm glad to see you, Mr. Kirke, — even if your visit to New York was a little unexpected.

ABNER: Have you seen your father — an' found out why I came?

ESTELLE: Yes; I know everything; in fact, I know more than you do.

ABNER: What d'you mean by that?

ESTELLE (*putting an arm around Myra*): That Myra is to become my legal sister very shortly, for she has honored my brother by consenting to marry him — provided you have no objections.

ABNER (*taken back*): Why, — I don't see's I have any right to object — considerin' —

ESTELLE (*helping him out when he stops in confusion*): Considering the matter is already settled.

ABNER (*turning to Right, as if expecting Paul to be there*): Why, I thought Paul came in with me.

ESTELLE: He started to, but turned back — for some reason or other.

ABNER: I reckon I know why, an' I don't blame him much — after what he told me in the other room; an' I want to say to you, Miss Estelle, if he'd 'a' harmed a hair o' your head I b'lieve I'd 'a' choked the life out o' him, — the same 's I wanted to do to your brother when I first got here.

MYRA (*anxiously*): But you don't feel that way toward Gordon now, do you, father?

ABNER: I guess not, Myra. Mr. Berkley kinder got me on the hip with his argiment, an' I reckon I've quit seein' red for good an' all.

ESTELLE (*smiling*): I have no doubt of it, and you're not the first man that my father has been able to argue down.

ABNER: I can 'preciate that. Guess that's the way he's made most of his money — jess kinder talked it out o' folkses' pockets by argument.

*(Enter Berkley and Gordon at Left, the latter ill at ease and casting a furtive glance toward Abner, who sobers up and looks across at Gordon thoughtfully.)*

BERKLEY *(nodding genially to Myra)*: Well, the tension seems to be considerable less in this office since I left it. That must be the result of your taking charge of things, Estelle.

ESTELLE: Not at all, father. Mr. Kirke insists that it's the result of your forceful argument. *(Earnestly)* But I really believe it is due to the watchful guidance of a kind Providence to save us all from lasting disgrace.

ABNER: An' I'll say Amen! to that, Miss Estelle.

BERKLEY: So will I. *(Drawing Gordon forward)* I ran into my son downstairs and brought him up here to face you, Mr. Kirke. We'll leave you two alone, if you so desire.

*(Myra shows alarm; Gordon uneasiness.)*

ABNER: No; I have little to say to him. *(Stepping over to Gordon)* Young man, you needn't fear that I'm goin' to jump you; but you can thank your lucky stars that I saw your father an' sister afore I met you, or there'd been hell to pay — *(To Others)* I beg your pardon.

BERKLEY: My son has just told me that he wishes to marry your daughter, Mr. Kirke; isn't that true, Gordon?

GORDON: Yes; it's the least I can do to —

BERKLEY: You needn't say any more. It's the first decent wish you've ever expressed, and I hope it's only the beginning of a better career. *(Taking Myra's hand)* Myra, words are useless at present; but if my son doesn't treat you well in the future, the Lord Harry help him, —

that's all. (*Indicating Abner*) There will be two of us to see that he walks a pretty straight chalk-line hereafter.

MYRA (*bashfully*): I don't think I shall need any assistance to manage — my husband.

ESTELLE: Many a woman has thought that — to her sorrow. So a little reserve fund of wholesome male aggressiveness may be a good thing to have to fall back upon in time of need.

BERKLEY (*suddenly, looking around*): But where's Paul?

ESTELLE: In the drafting room, I believe; but I don't think he cares to come out while I'm in the office.

ABNER: But that's just what he's goin' to do — an' tell you afore us all how sorry he is that —

ESTELLE (*interrupting*): You must not think of anything like that, Mr. Kirke. It would be most humiliating to him — and to me. He has done nothing very serious, — no matter what his original intentions were.

BERKLEY (*as Abner is about to object*): You let my daughter manage this affair, Mr. Kirke. I have yet to see a case where her judgment proved faulty. There is something under all this which I don't understand, but I have absolute faith in her, and I'm willing to abide by whatever decision she makes. (*Indicating door Left*) I would suggest that you, Myra and Gordon, step into the other room for a little while, as some things can't be discussed before witnesses.

ABNER: I reckon you're right, Mr. Berkley, an' I'm a blunderin' old fool. But you don't have to kick me to make me take a hint.

(*Nods to Myra and Gordon and All Three go out at Left.*)

BERKLEY: Estelle, have you any objection to my calling Paul in here?

ESTELLE (*with back toward Right, looking aimlessly at blue-print on desk*): Why, — no; — I can't say that I have.

BERKLEY: That's all I want to know. (*Opening door Right, calling*) Paul, come in here, please.

(*Enter Paul, ill at ease.*)

Your father and I have decided that the best solution of our deplorable situation is for Gordon to marry your sister, and my son is willing to do so. He is now anxious to atone for past errors.

PAUL: I'm glad to hear this news, Mr. Berkley. It removes a great load off my mind.

BERKLEY: I thought it would; that's why I called you in. (*Suddenly*) By Jove! I forgot to tell your father something. (*Crosses to Left*) Please wait until I come back, Paul. I'll only be gone a few minutes. Don't let my daughter bore you while I'm away. She's not in a very entertaining mood this morning, but the vagaries of women go beyond the comprehension of mere man, and it's useless for us to try to understand them. All we can do is to accept them as they are; for with all their faults — and in spite of *our* faults — we love them still.

(*Exits.*)

(*Paul, after a glance at Estelle, stares moodily at floor, while she traces aimless patterns on desk; but finally she cranes her head around and steals a look at him.*)

ESTELLE (*after a moment's hesitation*): Paul, — isn't it foolish of us to act this way, — as if we had committed some crime?

PAUL: You haven't, — but I have.

ESTELLE: It wasn't a crime — simply a temporary aberration of your mind.

PAUL: No; I was a beast — an unclean thing — who should never again be permitted to be in the same room with you.

ESTELLE: Don't you think I'm the best judge of that? Do you believe I would remain here if I entertained such thoughts?

PAUL: But you can never forgive me for taking you to that awful place.

ESTELLE: You — haven't asked me to.

PAUL: I know it would be useless.

ESTELLE: Try me — and see.

PAUL (*stepping toward her in amazement*): Is it possible — that you —?

ESTELLE: Yes; in spite of everything — I — can't you — guess — the rest?


PAUL: I think I can — and I shall take what the gods give me — without another question!

ESTELLE: You may, — (*as he embraces her fiercely*), — but I feared you never would — again.  
(*He kisses her as*

CURTAIN FALLS.

END OF PLAY.

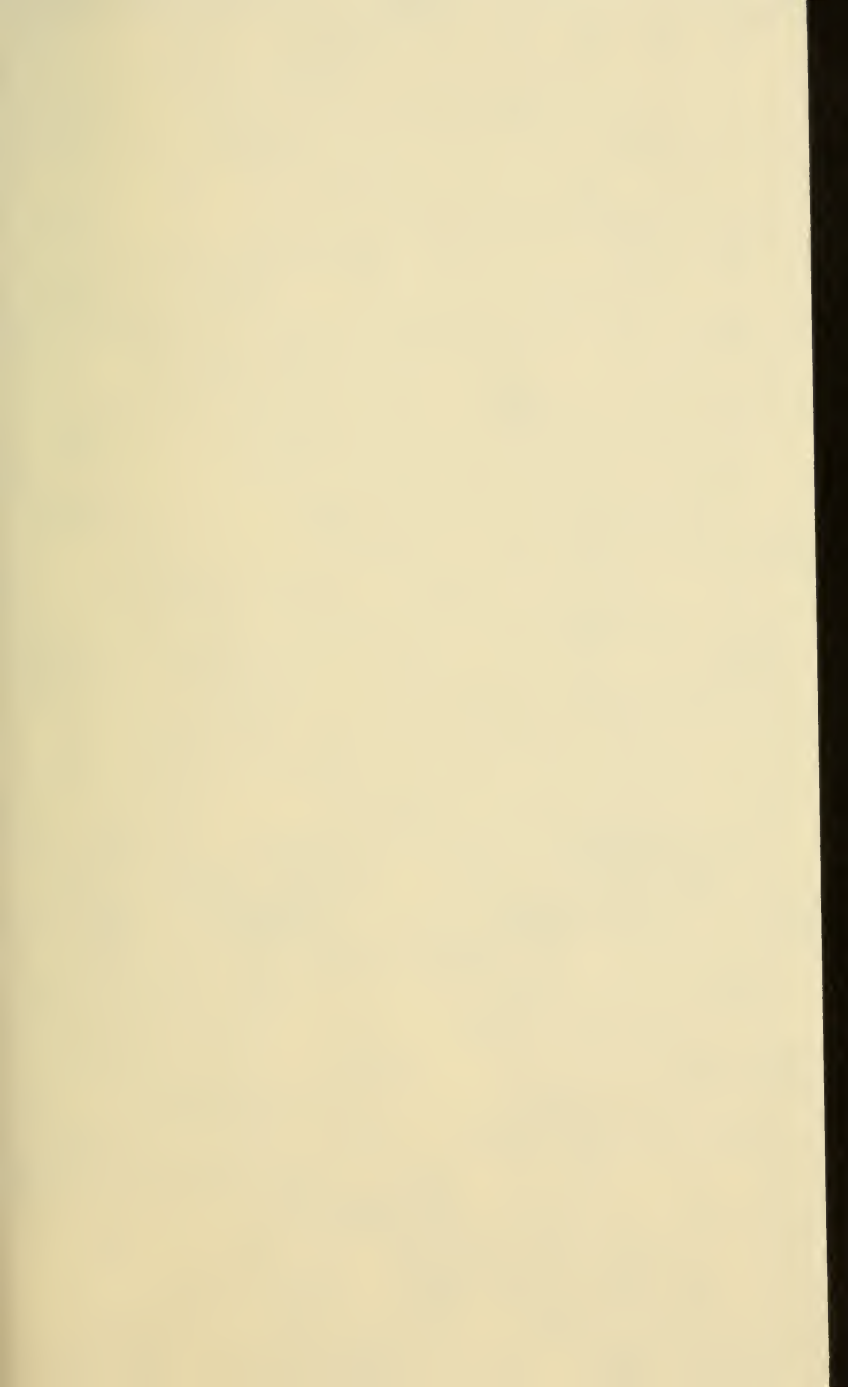
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